"The Dutchman Mounts Guard" by R.

EDWARD DALY — JAY LUCA — R.

# Short Stories

Twice A Month

January 25th

25c

A Long HASHKNIFE Novelette — by W. C. TUTTLE

**NOTE HOW LISTERINE GARGLE REDUCED GERMS**



BEFORE

The two drawings illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted; and even one hour after, germ reductions were still reduced as much as 80%.



AFTER

## AT THE FIRST SYMPTOM OF A COLD OR SORE THROAT—

# Listerine, *QUICK!*

**Listerine Antiseptic reaches way back on the throat surfaces to kill "secondary invaders"... the very types of germs that make a cold more troublesome.**

This prompt and frequent use of full strength Listerine Antiseptic may keep a cold from getting serious, or head it off entirely . . . at the same time relieving throat irritation when due to a cold.

Its value as a precaution against colds and sore throats has been demonstrated by some of the sanest, most impressive research work ever attempted in connection with cold prevention and treatment.

*Ten Years of Research*

Actual tests conducted on employees in several industrial plants during a ten year period of research revealed this astonishing truth: That those who gargled Listerine twice daily had fewer colds and milder colds than non-users, and fewer sore throats.

This impressive record is explained, we believe, by Listerine Antiseptic's germ-killing action . . . its ability to kill threatening "secondary invaders"—the very types of germs that live in the mouth and throat and are largely responsible, many authorities say, for the bothersome aspects of a cold.

When you gargle with Listerine Antiseptic, the cool amber liquid reaches way back on throat surfaces and kills millions of the "secondary invaders" on those areas—not all of them, mind you, but so many that any major invasion of the delicate membrane may be halted and infection thereby checked.

*Tests Showed Outstanding Germ Reductions on Tissue Surfaces*

Even 15 minutes after Listerine gargle, tests have shown bacterial reductions on mouth and throat surfaces ranging to 96.7%. Up to 80% an hour afterward.

In view of this evidence, don't you think it's a sensible precaution against colds to gargle with Listerine systematically twice a day and oftener when you feel a cold getting started?

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

ACTION, ADVENTURE, MYSTERY

# Short

Every author's finest and

## CONTENTS


**THE VALLEY OF VANISHING HERDS**
**(A Complete Novel)** — **W. C. Tuttle** — **6**
*Hashknife and Sleepy Followed a Long and Devious Trail. It Might Lead to Danger or to Death. Sleepy Sighed That He Hoped It Would Lead to Food*

**BANGKOK AND BACK** — **Edward Daly** — **73**
*American, Dutch and British Currency, Notes to the Value of One Million Dollars, Lying on the Bamboo Table Like the Jack-pot in Some Fantastic Poker Game.*

**SAMURAI** — **Frank Richardson Pierce** — **84**
*First a Little Store Raided, Then a Larger One, Then a Wholesale Business Held Up — Quite as if the Axis Were "Proceeding According to Plan"*

**THE SKUNK (Verse)** — **S. Omar Barker** — **90**

**MR. CINDERELLA** — **Lawrence Treat** — **91**
*Meek little Herbert Elkins Paroled Himself from the Humdrum for One Glorious Hour of the American Underworld!*

**THE RED POOL** — **Jay Lucas** — **100**
*Faro Ed Was on the Dodge; Where He Made His Mistake Was in Thinking Himself Alone in That Predicament*

**THE GOLDEN GULLY** — **Kenneth Perkins** — **108**
*The Personnel Director at the Aircraft Factory Interviews a Man Whose Experience Indeed Surpasses That Given to Most Human Beings*



SHORT STORIES issued semi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City, N. Y., and entered as second class matter, November 24, 1937, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE in the United States, American Possessions, Mexico and South America, $5.00 per year; to Canada, $6.50; and to all other countries, $6.60. Price payable in advance. January 25, 1942. Vol CLXXVIII, No. 2. Whole Number 866.

WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President and Treasurer.* S. A. FRAZER, *Secretary.* D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.*

# WANTED

# Men Anxious To Make $30 $40 $50 a Week

RADIO TECHNICIANS HOLD GOOD JOBS in more than 800 Broadcasting stations in the U. S. with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Aviation, Police, Commercial Radio are other fields which employ Radio Technicians and Operators. I give you the Radio training you need for jobs like these, and train you to be ready when Television opens new jobs in the future. Get the facts. Mail the Coupon.

## Busy Radio Industry Increasing Demand For Radio Operators and Technicians

## LEARNING RADIO AT HOME NIGHTS THIS WAY HAS LANDED GOOD JOBS FOR HUNDREDS

Here is a quick way to more pay. Radio offers beginners a chance to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now, and to train for opportunities paying up to $30, $40, $50 a week for full-time Radio Technicians and Operators. On top of record business, the Radio industry is getting millions of dollars worth of vital defense orders. Many Radio Technicians and Operators have entered military service, opening many opportunities for men with Radio training. Clip the coupon below and mail it. Find out how I have trained men from 16 to 50 years old to make more money in Radio—how I will train you, too, for Radio's opportunities.

### Extra Pay In Army, Navy, Too

Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW.

REPAIRING, SERVICING, SELLING home and Auto Radio sets (there are more than 50,000,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Public Address Systems are another source of profit for Radio Technicians. Many Radio Technicians operate their own spare time or full time Radio business. Mail the Coupon.

### Beginners Quickly Learn to Earn $5 to $10 a Week in Spare Time

Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable practical experience. You also get my modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

### Mail Coupon for 64-page Book

It tells about my Course; the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows letters from more than 100 men I trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. Mail the Coupon in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President,
Dept. 2AM,
National Radio Institute,
Washington, D. C.

## N. R. I. Trained These Men At Home

**Chief Operator Broadcasting Station**

Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator.—Hollis F. Hayes, 327 Madison St., Lapeer, Mich.

**Now Chief Radio Engineer**

I am now Chief Radio Engineer at Kankakee Ordnance Works and very pleased with my new position. If I had not taken the N. R. I. Course I might be digging ditches or perhaps unemployed.—R. S. Lewis, 410 Whitney St., Joliet, Ill.

**$40 a Month Extra in Spare Time**

I do Radio Service work in my spare time only, operating from my home, and I net about $40 a month. I was able to start servicing Radios 3 months after enrolling with N. R. I.—Wm. J. Chermak, R. No. 1, Box 287, Hopkins, Minn.

**Had Own Business 6 Months After Enrolling**

I went into business for myself 6 months after enrolling. In my Radio repair shop I do about $300 worth of business a month. I can't tell you how valuable your Course has been to me.—A. J. Baten, Box 1168, Gladewater, Texas.

### FREE TO MEN WHO WANT BETTER JOBS

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2AM
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Age.....

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

# Stories

latest stories—no reprints

**January 25th, 1942**

**THE MIGHTY BLOCKHEAD**
**(Second Part of Four)** **Frank Gruber** **114**
*Sam Cragg Began to Fume Just as Soon as Anyone Mentioned Blockhead the Strong Man. It Was Just Too Perfect an Allusion*

**RAT FEATHERS** **J. J. des Ormeaux** **139**
*Oil Scouts, Leasehounds, Geologists, Royalty Men, All Grabbed Up a Hat and Toothbrush and Ran for West Arkansas*

**THE DUTCHMAN MOUNTS GUARD**
**(A Novelette)** **R. V. Gery** **152**
*There Was One Thing for Which the Visiting Brass Hat Went on Record—He Found It a Decided Bore to Have a Policeman Breathing Down His Neck*

**CURIODDITIES** **Irwin J. Weill** **169**

**THE SHOOTER'S CORNER** **Pete Kuhlhoff** **170**

**ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB** **173**

**COVER—Pete Kuhlhoff**

*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

Title registered in U. S. Patent Office PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

The entire contents of this magazine is protected by copyright and must not be reprinted. Copyright, 1942, by SHORT STORIES, INC.

# WOULD YOU GO TO HELL . . .

## FOR TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS??

**If world-famous scientists offered you ten grand—to act as official eye-witness of their attempts to conjure up demons and bring forth the dead—would you take on the job?**

**Watch out for scarlet temptations, for soul-wrenching thrills in the March Number of WEIRD TALES—on sale right now at your nearest newsstand!**

**Yes, it's**

**HELL ON EARTH**

**Robert Bloch's high-voltage, suspense-charged drama of Satan in tuxedo! Listen**

"Hidden in the topmost recesses of a modern skyscraper is a dark chamber, reeking of blood and musk—of hashish and the tomb. It is a room torn from the fifteenth century; a room torn from ancient dreams where ultra-modern tables, streamlined shelvings, groan with the impedimenta of forgotten nightmares . . . and shiny new refrigerators bulge with unnameable carcasses!"

**Don't miss this grand yarn . . . come and "raise hell" with Robert Bloch in his dynamic novelette of twentieth-century Fausts among the skyscrapers of Manhattan!**

*All in*

**the**

**March Number**

**of**

Weird Tales

**The Superfluous Phantom**

If you were a spook—how would YOU feel if they took away your haunting license?

**Death of the Kraken**

In the Sargasso Sea are many monsters—*Human Ones!*

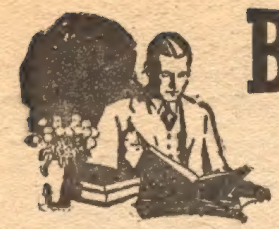
**The Rat Master**

The rodent regiments recognized one lord—and one lord alone!

AND MANY OTHER BRAND NEW, *DANGEROUS* TALES THAT WILL LITERALLY HOLD YOU SPELLBOUND!

**On Sale Now**

**PRICE 15c**



# Bigger Pay

*through*

## SPARE TIME TRAINING!

DO you want a better position and a higher salary? You can have these if you can do the work. LaSalle experts will show you how, guide you step by step to success and help solve your personal business problems through the time-saving LaSalle Problem Method. Our modern *salary-increasing plan* enables you to prepare during your spare hours, without interference with your present duties. Simply mark on the coupon the field in which you desire success, and we will mail you a valuable book describing the opportunities in that field, together with an outline of our *salary-increasing plan*. There is no cost or obligation. Find out how the *salary-increasing plan* starts average men and women on the high road to success and financial independence. Check and mail the coupon NOW.

*Find Yourself Through LaSalle!*

**LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**

*A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION*

Dept. 175-RA Chicago

Please send me full information regarding the up-to-the-minute course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your 48-page booklet describing the opportunities and requirements in that field, all without obligation to me.

- ☐ **Business Management:** Training for Official Managerial, Sales and Departmental Executive positions.
- ☐ **Modern Salesmanship:** Training for position as Sales Executive, Salesman, Sales Trainer, Sales Promotion Manager, Manufacturers' Agent, and all positions in retail, wholesale or specialty selling.
- ☐ **Higher Accountancy:** Training for position as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.
- ☐ **Traffic Management:** Training for position as Railroad, Truck or Industrial Traffic Manager, Rate Expert, Freight Solicitor, etc.
- ☐ **Law:** LL. B. Degree.
- ☐ **Modern Foremanship:** Training for positions in Shop Management, such as that of Superintendent, General Foreman, Foreman, Sub-Foreman, etc.
- ☐ **Industrial Management:** Training for Works Management, Production Control, Industrial Engineering, etc.
- ☐ **Modern Business Correspondence:** Training for Sales or Collection Correspondent, Sales Promotion Manager, Mail Sales Manager, Secretary, etc.
- ☐ **Stenotypy:** Training in the new superior machine shorthand, Stenotypy.
- ☐ **Expert Bookkeeping**
- ☐ **Effective Speaking**
- ☐ **Business English**
- ☐ **C. P. A. Coaching**
- ☐ **Commercial Law**
- ☐ **Stenotypy—Stenography**
- ☐ **Credit and Collection Correspondence**

Name.....Age.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

## Think of It! Our Graduates Run 43% of ALL the Identification Bureaus of America!

Send for complete list of our 750 Bureaus where our graduates have been placed in good positions as

# FINGERPRINT EXPERTS

Then write the nearest Bureau and learn what our graduates think of us!

We have space here to list only a FEW of these more than 750 institutions, so be sure to send for the *complete* list!

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| State of Idaho | Trenton, N. J. | |
| State of Colorado | Detroit, Mich. | |
| State of Iowa | El Paso, Tex. | |
| State of Utah | Schenectady, N. Y. | |
| State of Ohio | Scranton, Pa. | |
| Boston, Mass. | Lincoln, Neb. | |
| New York, N. Y. | Mobile, Ala. | |
| Pittsburgh, Pa. | Little Rock, Ark. | |
| St. Paul, Minn. | Pontiac, Mich. | |
| Mexico City, Mex. | Havana, Cuba | |
| Augusta, Ga. | Miami, Fla. | |
| Seattle, Wash. | Birmingham, Ala. | |
| Omaha, Neb. | Columbus, Ohio | |
| Des Moines, Ia. | Galveston, Tex. | |
| Montreal, Can. | Houston, Tex. | |
| Cedar Rapids, Iowa | Windsor, Ont. | |
| Elgin, Ill. | Pueblo, Colo. | |
| Syracuse, N. Y. | Salt Lake City, Utah | |
| Tampa, Fla. | Atlantic City, N. J. | |
| Long Beach, Cal. | Sioux City, Iowa | |
| St. Louis, Mo. | Rochester, N. Y. | |
| State of Michigan | Lansing, Mich. | Cleveland, Ohio |
| State of Washington | Burlington, Ia. | Spokane, Wash. |
| State of Massachusetts | Erie, Pa. | Fort Worth, Tex. |
| State of Illinois | Oklahoma City, Okla. | Shreveport, La. |

## Want a Regular Monthly Salary?

### Be a Secret Service and Identification Expert!

Enjoy the thrill of getting your man—with no personal danger—PLUS a regular monthly paid salary and the opportunity to share in Rewards. Learn at home, in spare time, and at low cost, the unique secrets of this young, fascinating and fast growing profession. You have exactly the same opportunity that was offered the hundreds of our graduates who now hold splendid positions in more than 750 institutions. Each of these bureaus has anywhere from ONE to FIFTEEN of our graduates on regular salaries—and new openings develop from time to time.

### Wonderful Opportunity for TRAINED MEN in This Young, Fast Growing Profession

Of the thousands of towns in America, three-fourths are still without identification bureaus. Many more are bound to come! That spells OPPORTUNITY. But you must be READY! It's easy to master this profession that combines thrills with personal safety, AND the security of a steady income. We show you HOW—just as we have already shown the hundreds who now hold good pay positions.

**FREE!** **The Confidential Reports Operator No. 38 Made to His Chief**

Just rush coupon! Follow this Operator's exciting hunt for a murderous gang. Also, get free, "The Blue Book of Crime," showing the wonderful opportunities in the field of Finger Prints and Crime Detection. Take your first step TODAY toward a steady income and success. Mail coupon NOW!

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Avenue Dept. 1561 Chicago

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 1561, Chicago.

Gentlemen: With no obligation on my part, send me Confidential Reports of Operator No. 38, also illustrated "Blue Book of Crime," complete list of bureaus employing your graduates, together with your low prices and Easy Terms offer. (Literature will be sent ONLY to persons stating their age.)

Name .....

Address..... Age.....

# THE VALLEY OF

## *A Complete Novel*

***Not Takin' Chances! Why, That Hashknife Hartley Could Trail a Snake Across a Lake***

I

IT WAS well after dark when the herd reached the old shipping corrals at Isabella. There was no breeze, and the dust-cloud, only a few feet from the ground, obscured them for a while, as the weary cattle stopped. Cowboys swore quietly, as they bunched the herd. The corral was far too small to hold it, and that meant night-herding.

They had ridden all day in the choking dust and heat, and they wanted to quench their thirst at the one saloon in Isabella, and not have to take their turn in riding night herd. A fire glowed at the chuck-wagon, where the old range cook made supper.

Hashknife Hartley, six feet-four of gaunt manhood, his lean face grimy from dust and sweat, yanked off his saddle. Sleepy Stevens, his partner, rode in beside him and began unsaddling. No night-herding for them; they were through with the UF outfit, and free to do as they pleased. That was the agreement.

They moved over near the chuck-wagon, where several of the men had already gathered, and were gently chiding the cook because supper was not quite ready. But the chuck-wagon cook is supreme in his own right, and he paid them no attention.

Slim Sherrod, a tall, buck-tooth cowboy, a newcomer to the UF, sprawled on a saddle-blanket, smoking a cigarette. Dell Packer, the foreman of the outfit, rode in from the town, and dismounted. Dell had the few pieces of mail for the boys. He handed the cook a letter and came over to Hashknife.

"Somebody in this outfit is important," he laughed, as he handed Hashknife a telegram. "Been here a week, they said."

Everyone watched Hashknife as he read the telegram. Down there a telegram was usually bad news. Hashknife read it casually and handed it to Sleepy, who turned it toward the light of the fire, in order to read it. Then he handed it back to Hashknife, without comment.

"Somebody died?" asked Slim.

"Prob'ly," said Sleepy. "They do it ever once in a while."

The telegram was from Bob Marsh, secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, and read:

AM ANXIOUS TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HENRY WEBSTER AT ANTELOPE FLATS. CAN YOU LOCATE HIM AND ASK HIM TO WRITE OR WIRE ME AS IT IS VERY IMPORTANT. REGARDS TO YOU AND SLEEPY.

It was a simple request, except that

# VANISHING HERDS

## By W. C. TUTTLE, *Author of the Hashknife Hartley Stories*

neither of them had even been at Antelope Flats, nor did they know just where it was located. The rest of the men came hurrying in, when the cook yelled, "Grub pile!" and in a few moments the hungry cowboys were too busy to talk.

Dell Packer came over and sat down beside Hashknife to eat.

"Sorry yuh ain't goin' back with me," he said.

"Thank yuh, Dell," replied Hashknife. "We like the UF, but it ain't in us to stay long any place."

"Yeah, I know," nodded Dell. "It's allus my luck, when I get a puncher who knows how to handle stock, he's also got a itchin' foot."

"Have yuh ever been in Antelope Flats?" asked Sleepy.

Dell shook his head. "Never been up there," he said. "It's up in Lost Horse Valley, about a hundred and fifty miles from here."

"Slim can tell yuh about it," offered Shortly Hill. "He's come from up thataway."

Slim Sherrod lifted his head and looked across at Shorty.

"Who the hell told you all that?" he asked quickly.

"Well, yuh wasn't talkin' in yore sleep, Slim," retorted Shorty.

"Anythin' wrong in bein' from there?" asked Dell curiously.

Slim laughed shortly and shook his head. "Not a thing, Dell."

"When you was up there, Slim," said Hashknife, "did you ever know a man named Henry Webster?"

Slim scowled thoughtfully. "Henry Webster? No, I never heard of him."

"Then don't worry about him," said Hashknife quietly.

"That's what I say," remarked Dell, tossing his plate aside. "Slim, you and Les Hart take the early shift. Want to walk over and see the town, Hashknife? It's sure a metropolis."

The town of Isabella was a shipping point for all the cattle outfits in that part of the country, but it was still a one-horse cow-town, with one street, one big saloon, and possibly two dozen weather-beaten houses. The depot was a quarter of a mile from the town.

THERE seemed to be some commotion in the saloon, as the group of men from the UF spread came up on the porch. There were possibly two dozen men in the place, and their interest was centered on a young man at the bar. This particular young man was attired in a flaming red shirt, the gaudiest pair of chaps ever seen in that vicinity, an expensive, white Stetson, and patent-leather, high-heel boots.

He was a very mild-looking young man, wearing horn-rim glasses, and his complexion showed clearly that very little Arizona sun had ever got a chance at his skin. At the end of the bar was a skinny little rawhider, also wearing an expensive Stetson, which was a trifle too large, and which kept sliding down over his eyes. His legs were as bowed as a barrel-hoop.

Facing the young man was a big, rough product of the cow country, grim and hairy, a heavy gun swinging at his thigh, a shapeless sombrero yanked down over one eye. Evidently they had been having words, as Hashknife and the rest of the boys came in. The hairy one said:

"Yo're a hell of a specimen, feller. If you talk back to me, I'll squirsh yuh, jist like I would a fancy bug."

The audience chuckled, but it did not seem funny to the young man.

"There is no such word as 'squirsh'," he said, and looked around at the faces, partly obscured in the tobacco smoke.

"Artemus," he said quietly. The little, bow-legged rawhider cuffed the hat away from his eyes, shrunk a little as he said, "Yessir."

"I believe we will go now, Artemus."

"I tried to tell yuh fifteen minutes ago that the train had done left," complained Artemus.

"Artemus!" snorted the hairy one. "My Gawd!"

Artemus let the hat slide down over his eyes again. The hairy one moved over close to the young man, his jaw sticking out belligerently.

"You ain't goin' no place, Handsome," he snarled. "When I git through—"

*Whap!* The innocent-looking young man suddenly uppercut with his left hand, connected solidly with the hairy one's chin, and the belligerent cowboy went down like a pole-axed steer. Then the young man reached down, yanked the cowboy's gun from his holster, turned to face the stunned audience and started backing toward the doorway, the gun wavering in his hand.

"Come, Artemus," he said.

The little rawhider had his big hat in his hand now, staring at the young man. The room was still. Artemus said in a strained voice:

"I'll be a dry-nurse to a dinny-sour—I shore will!"

The young man was still backing toward the doorway, where he backed into a chair, fell over it and landed on the floor, the gun flying out of his hand. Artemus stopped and looked around. The young man sat up and shook his head.

"I cannot seem to do anything right," he said quietly.

The hairy one was on his knees, shaking his head. He saw the gun and made a dive at it, but Hashknife kicked it away from his clawing hand.

"Thank you kindly," said the young man, looking up at Hashknife, his glasses slightly askew. "That man is ignorant enough to shoot one."

Then he got to his feet and walked out, followed by Artemus, who flinched, as though expecting a kick from the rear. The crowd, all except the hairy one, howled. The hairy one had lost a front tooth.

While the crowd was talking things over, Hashknife and Sleepy left the saloon and went to the hotel, where they found the two men, talking with the proprietor about a suite of rooms, with baths.

"We ain't got no sweets and I never heard of none," said the proprietor. "And you'll have to git yore bath at the barber shop. We just sell rooms and a bed."

THE young man saw Hashknife and smiled. Artemus adjusted his hat and leaned against the counter. Hashknife and Sleepy sat down and the young man joined them.

"I am grateful to you," he told Hashknife. "That person might have fired that gun at me."

"Yeah, and you better look out for that person," said Hashknife. "He is Buck Shell."

Artemus came over and sat down, slightly ill at ease. He grinned at Sleepy. The name did not fit Artemus. The young man said, "I am Alexander Hamilton Montgomery."

"Sounds like the Civil War had met a mail order house," said Sleepy.

"And this man," continued the young man, "is Artemus Day, my valet."

"Mostly I'm called Smoky," said Artemus.

"A valet?" queried Hashknife.

"Whatever that is," nodded Artemus. "I'm learnin' him the West."

"I engaged him in Cheyenne," informed Montgomery.

"I was drunk," said Artemus.

"That is his failing," sighed Montgomery. "Liquor and poker. Looking back at the incident this evening," he went on, "you were of no assistance to me, Artemus."

"Well," replied Artemus, "you've told me lots of times that if you wanted me for anythin', you'd call me."

SLEEPY'S face was red from suppressed laughter, and Hashknife was having a difficult time in concealing his mirth. He controlled his emotions and asked, "Mr. Montgomery, just what are you doing in Isabella?"

"We got left," said Artemus. "Train had a hot-box; so we came over here to see what the place looked like."

"Oh, you were just passin' through, eh?" queried Sleepy.

"Exactly," nodded Montgomery. "I am studying the West. I am a playright.

"At least, I feel that I am. I also feel that the great drama of the West has never been written. That is my mission, Mr—er—"

"My name is Hartley," smiled Hashknife. "Hashknife Hartley. This gentleman is Sleepy Stevens."

Artemus was staring at Hashknife, his jaw sagging.

"Hashknife Hartley? I'll be a dry-nurse to a dinny-sour!" he said.

"What is wrong with you, Artemus?" asked Montgomery.

"Nothin'," replied Artemus. "Jist a—a funny name, thasall."

"I must put that name in my notebook," said Montgomery. "Now where did I put that book? Did I leave it on the train?"

"Mebbe," nodded Artemus. "I—I'll remember it for yuh."

A man came from the rear of the hotel. He was tall and severe-looking, carrying a heavy cane. He said to Montgomery, "There's another train through here in an hour, and I wish you'd take it. I'll see that yuh get there safely. I'm the marshal of Isabella."

"You ain't aimin' to run us out, are yuh?" asked Artemus.

"I reckon you can walk. Fact of the matter is, Buck Shell and his gang are gettin' drunk. When they're drunk, they're bad enough to handle, without you around to make it worse. I don't want anybody to get killed, and I don't want to have to kill anybody. I hope you see my point of view."

"Oh, sure," nodded Artemus.

Montgomery turned to Hashknife. "If you were in my place would you go?" he asked soberly.

"If I were in yore place," replied Hashknife, "I would have been holed up under that depot platform an hour ago."

"Thank you very much. Officer, we are ready. Comé, Artemus."

"Shore glad to meetcha," said Artemus.

"Where are you headin' for?" asked Sleepy.

"Antelope Flats," replied Artemus. "I ain't been there for a long time. Dang 'em, they said I'd never amount to anythin'. You wait'll they see me. No forty-a-month cowpunchin' for me. I'll high-tone that bunch."

"Good luck to yuh, Mr. Montgomery," said Hashknife.

"Thank you very much, sir."

The three men walked out, and Sleepy doubled over in his chair.

"I'm glad they're gone," he said huskily. "A man can't stand much of that kinda stuff. I wonder where he got the clothes!"

"Who knows? I'll bet he bought that hat for Artemus. No puncher ever had money enough to buy that kind of a hat. And they're goin' to Antelope Flats. That's where Henry Webster lives. Maybe we'll see 'em again. Let's go back to the wagon and get some sleep."

Slim Sherrod and Les Hart were at the wagon, getting some coffee, when Hashknife and Sleepy came back. They had about two more hours to ride the herd, before another relief would take their places. Hashknife and Sleepy spread their bed-rolls between the wagon and the corral fence, and were crawling into their blankets, when the two riders went away.

But Hashknife and Sleepy were only in their bed-rolls about five minutes, when they went right away from there. Red ants! Millions of them!

They shook out their bedding, went a hundred feet away from that spot, and lighted matches to examine the ground, before going to bed again. Tony Cano and Shorty Hill came back from town, well filled with Isabella whiskey, and their arguments awakened Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Watch 'em!" chuckled Sleepy. "They're bunkin' down right on top of our ant-hill."

"They're so full of bad liquor that even an ant wouldn't bite 'em," replied Hashknife.

The two men stretched out in their blankets, and, even at a hundred feet, their snores could be heard. After awhile Sleepy said, "Yeah, I reckon they're ant-proof."

They were nearly asleep again when the report of a gun, only a short distance away, brought them upright in their blankets. A man yelled painfully, and was threshing around on the ground.

"What happened?" yelled Sleepy.

"I'm shot!" howled Shorty Hill. "Somebody shot me! Get a doctor, I'm dyin'!"

He was out of his blankets, pawing at himself and staggering around. The cook came running, trailing a blanket over one shoulder, and carrying an unlighted lantern, which he was holding high. Sleepy lighted it.

"If yo're dyin', why don'tcha lay down?" asked the cook.

"The bullet went the whole len'th of me!" wailed Shorty.

"Hold still while I look yuh over," ordered Hashknife.

Shorty stood there, swaying like a sapling in a breeze, his face white in the lantern light.

The bullet had cut through a fold of his undershirt, left a red furrow above his knee, and gone out through the foot of his bed-roll.

"You ain't hurt," said Hashknife.

"I ain't?" asked Shorty, greatly relieved. "I thought I was dyin'. That's the first time I ever got shot."

"You ain't been shot yet," growled the cook. "You was missed. Go to sleep—yo're all right."

"Sleep? Me? I'm goin' to set up all night, with a gun in my hand. Nobody ever can say that Shorty Hill died without a struggle."

"I don't think he'll come back," said Hashknife.

"Thinkin'," said Shorty, "ain't goin' to do me no good, after I'm a corpse."

Slim and Les rode in, attracted by the shot, got some coffee and rode away again. Hashknife picked up his bed-roll and led the way to a spot some distance away from where they had lain.

"There wasn't any ants over at our last place," said Sleepy.

"I wasn't thinkin' about ants," said Hashknife quietly. "You'll notice that Shorty spread his roll just about where I was bedded, when the ants drove us away."

"Yuh mean—somebody was gunnin' for you?"

"Who would try to kill Shorty Hill?"

Sleepy was quiet for quite a while after he was inside his bed. Then he said, "Do yuh reckon that telegram had anythin' to do with it?"

"That telegram merely asked us to get in touch with a certain man."

"I know that," replied Sleepy, "but I never did trust Bob Marsh. If yuh ask me—Slim Sherrod knows Henry Webster."

Hashknife chuckled. "I wonder if knowing Henry is a sin."

"Just like I said," replied Sleepy, "I don't trust Bob Marsh."

## II

IT WAS mid-afternoon in Antelope Flats, and the town dozed under a brassy sun. Saddle horses were strung along the hitching-posts, and here and there were buggy teams and wagons. A few men sat in the shade of the Prong Horn Saloon. Joe Le Blanc, the blacksmith, his apron flung aside, sprawled in the shade of his shop and drank beer from a pail with Alphabet Anderson, who owned the livery stable.

Jim Martin, the sheriff, walked heavily into his office, where Manana Higgins, his deputy, sprawled on a cot, reading a paperback novel. Martin sat down at his desk and mopped his brow.

"I thought that damn dude and his henchman was here," he said.

"Oh, they went out quite a while ago," sighed Manana.

"I hope they stay out."

Manana marked his page with a strip of whang-leather, and looked up.

"I sold him that old Colt of yours for seven dollars, Jim."

"My old Colt? You've got a lot of gall, Manana. Why, that gun is worth easy ten dollars—if it'd stay cocked."

"It won't—but he don't know it."

"Hell, he might kill himself with it!"

"That's why I took off two and a half

on the price. I figure it would be dirt cheap."

"Where'd they go from here?"

"He said they was goin' to the bank. He said, 'Come, Artemus.' Artemus! Smoky acts like he owned the earth. Some day I'm goin' to kick him in the seat of the pants so hard it'll straighten his legs."

And because Antelope Flats was enjoying a siesta, no one saw three men ride in behind the bank and dismount quickly. Antelope Flats kept right on drowsing, until they heard a fusillade of shots and some strident yelps. Jim Martin came to life, dived for his gun rack, and ran out into the street, levering a shell into the chamber.

Charles Stevens, the banker, was on the sidewalk, brandishing a revolver, and yelling, "Holdup! Holdup!"

Right behind him came Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Artemus. The three riders swept out from around the bank and into the street about two blocks from the entrance to the bank, running in a cloud of dust.

"There they go!" yelled the banker, and shot a hole in the top of his porch. Alexander Hamilton Montgomery attempted to shoot, too, but the gun went off, and Joe Le Blanc, across the street, dived for cover.

Jim Martin steadied his heavy rifle against a porch post, notched his sights on that dust cloud, and began throwing lead. Then he ran back into the office, grabbed his gun belt, and with Manana right behind him they headed for the Prong Horn hitch-rack.

"We're borrowin' two horses!" he yelled at the men. No one denied him the right, as some of them ran for their horses, while others headed for the bank.

"They got twelve hundred dollars," informed the excited banker.

Joe Le Blanc came running. "By gar, I'm theenk those sheriff hit one man!" he panted. "He is not able to sit up quite plain."

"You think one of them got hit?" asked the banker.

"Sure. I see the other man grab him. I think he got hit."

The crowd was soon augmented by several dozen more people, and Le Blanc elaborated his story up to a point, where he saw one man completely shot out of his saddle, perhaps shot entirely in two, because he thought he saw each of the other men take a half. The banker turned to Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and said:

"Well, you said you would like to witness a real Western bank robbery."

"The—er—service was very good," said the young man soberly.

IT HAD been a long, hard ride up the Valley of the Lost Horse, and Hashknife and Sleepy were tired, as they rode slowly, expecting at any time to find the town of Antelope Flats.

"It begins to look like civilization," said Sleepy.

They came down from the rim of the hills, where the road cut through a scattering of cottonwoods, and stopped to let their horses drink at a small stream.

"Nice range," remarked Hashknife. "Plenty feed."

"You sure make it sound invitin'," sighed Sleepy. "If we don't hit that town pretty soon, I'm goin' to try grass. I'm awful hungry."

The old road wound down through the dry-wash for about a mile, and came out through a small clearing, where a tumbledown fence partly enclosed an old shack. Lying in the middle of the road was the body of a man. Hashknife and Sleepy drew up quickly, searching the country for any sign of action. Neither of them spoke, as they dismounted. The man was on his face, both arms outspread.

Hashknife studied the dust in the road, reading all the signs, before going to the body and turning it over. He was a young

man, wearing cowboy garb. His gun had fallen from his holster and was in the dust.

"He was shot in the back," said Hashknife. "Never knew much about it, I don't suppose. The sign in the dirt says that he fell off his horse and rolled over. Horse might have been goin' fast, too."

They went back to their horses, circled the body and headed out across the valley. A mile or so further brought them to the main road, where a sign said that Antelope Flats was only two miles away.

There seemed to be quite a lot of people on the street for this time of the day, and they looked curiously at the two dust-covered riders, who drew up in front of the sheriff's office. A man asked them if they were looking for the sheriff.

"We found a dead man—murdered, I reckon," replied Hashknife.

Several more men came down there, and Hashknife explained where they found the body.

"That's the old Byers place," said one of them. "Just this side of Hoodoo Wash. By gosh, Le Blanc was right—the sheriff drilled one of 'em. We better get the coroner and then try to find the sheriff. He kept on the main road, and they switched off. Are yuh sure he's dead?"

"I'm afraid he is," replied Hashknife.

No one asked them to go along; so they stabled their tired horses and secured a room at the old hotel, before seeking food. The elderly proprietor, Andy Vincent, told them about the bank robbery, and that the blacksmith noted that one of the men was injured.

"You must have been just short of meetin' 'em," he said. "They might have took a shot at yuh."

"They might," smiled Hashknife. "Do you know a man named Henry Webster?"

"No, I don't reckon I ever did."

"Lived here long?"

"I've been runnin' this hotel for thirty years."

"And you never knew Henry Webster. We heard he lived here."

"Son," said Vincent patronizingly. "There ain't been no Henry Webster around here for thirty years that I know of."

They went outside and sat down on the shady porch.

"Can it be that Bob Marsh is also a liar?" asked Sleepy.

"My gosh!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Here comes Monty and his valet!"

"And Monty," added Sleepy, "is packin' a gun."

They came down the sidewalk, with Artemus about three steps to the rear, and stopped near Hashknife and Sleepy.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Alexander Hamilton Montgomery. Artemus grinned and adjusted his misfit hat.

"How do yuh like Antelope Flats?" asked Hashknife.

"Exciting place," replied Montgomery. "Very, very exciting."

"Bank robberies and everythin'," added Artemus.

"We were in the bank," said Montgomery.

"And," added Artemus, "Mr. Montgomery shot at the bandits and damn near killed the blacksmith."

A team and buckboard drew up at the front of the general store next door, driven by a very pretty and capable looking young lady.

"That's Sally Harder," whispered Artemus, "daughter of the meanest old devil that ever rode a track in the sand."

Sally tied one of the horses to a porch-post, glanced at the four men, and went into the store.

"Old Flint Harder owns the Quarter Circle H spread," said Artemus. "He's a cripple, and he hates the world. Him and Jim Martin, the sheriff, hated each other for years. Years ago Jim Martin mistook Harder for an outlaw, and busted him with a couple bullets. Not long ago Dean, Flint

Harder's son, married the sheriff's daughter."

"Complicated things, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"They tell me," nodded Artemus, and had to adjust his hat again.

Sally Harder came out and drove away.

"She's prob'ly been out to Dean's little ranch," Artemus said. "They tell me Flint is dead-set against her bein' friendly with them, but Sally laughs at him and keeps on goin' out there."

"I would like to meet her," said Montgomery quietly.

"Wait'll yuh meet her pa," suggested Artemus.

"I," said Montgomery," am not interested in her father."

"Yuh might be. Old Flint was so damn mad about Dean gettin' married that he said he'd shoot the first damn fool that came monkeyin' around Sally."

"I am no damn fool," said Montgomery stiffly.

Artemus shrugged again, and had to lift his hat off his eyes.

"Why don't yuh stuff some newspaper into the band of that hat?" asked Sleepy.

Before Artemus could reply, Andy Vincent spoke from the doorway.

"I reckon they're bringin' the body in."

A number of riders were escorting a wagon, which turned down a side street. Two of the riders came on and stopped in front of the hotel.

"The dead man was Dean Harder," said one of the men.

"Dean Harder!" exclaimed the hotel man. "No!"

"Yeah. Shot through the back. I reckon the others held him in the saddle as long as they could."

"The sheriff's son-in-law," said Andy Vincent. "That's awful."

"And Flint Harder's son," added the other man.

"What did Jim Martin say?" asked Vincent.

"Not a word. He turned the color of alkali dust, but he didn't say a thing. But nobody can blame him. He was throwin' lead at bank robbers."

"No, they can't blame him," agreed Vincent. "He didn't know who they were."

Vincent sat down in a chair and mopped his brow.

"Dean always was as wild as a hawk," he said, "but I didn't think he'd do that. Nell Martin is a fine girl. Jim didn't want her to marry Dean, and Flint didn't want Dean to marry Nell. They eloped. Flint gave Dean a little ranch and a few head of cows, and told him to go to hell. Mebbe Dean needed money. I heard he was havin' a hard time gettin' along."

A young cowboy came from the Prong Horn Saloon, crossed the street and headed in the direction taken by the wagon.

"That's Danny Long," said Vincent. "He owns a little ranch near Dean's place. Him and his wife are awful good friends of Dean and Nell. Danny is one feller that ain't scared to talk with Flint Harder. Danny hates the whole Quarter Circle H outfit.

"There goes Swede Olson, followin' Danny. He works for Danny, and he's always just about that far behind him. Funny old Swede. Packs a cap-and-ball Colt that won't stay cocked. He'll kill himself some day."

They were silent for a while, and finally Alexander Hamilton Montgomery said, "Speaking of guns which will not stay cocked—do they always kill their owner?"

"Not always," replied Hashknife soberly. "That's the trouble with them."

Artemus chuckled and his hat slid down again.

"Here comes the sheriff and deputy," said Vincent.

JIM MARTIN was a big man, with heavy features, long dangling arms and big feet. He walked like a man in loose sand, looking straight ahead. He

never looked at nor spoke to the men in front of the hotel. Manana Higgins was tall and lean, with the stiff-legged walk of a man who had spent most of his life in the saddle. He looked at the men, but said nothing.

Hashknife sighed and tossed his cigarette into the street.

"Life's a queer thing," he said quietly. "You can't dodge fate. That sheriff couldn't help doin' what he did. Dean Harder couldn't help what he did. Circumstances lead up to such things. Dean Harder was disowned for marryin' Martin's daughter. He needed money, because his father wouldn't help him over the rough road. So he took the quick way to get it. Fate put Jim Martin into the thing; put a gun in his hand in time to down the one man he didn't want to down. I believe it was all written in the book."

"You've got queer ideas, Hartley," said Vincent.

"I've seen queer things," replied Hashknife.

"A feller could keep from robbin' a bank, if he wanted to. We deal in cold, hard facts down in this country."

Vincent went back into the hotel. Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Artemus had been interested listeners. Montgomery said:

"Yours is an interesting theory, Mr. Hartley, but I just happened to think—that pretty girl is the sister of the slain bank robber!"

"That's right," agreed Sleepy.

"That is terrible. I—I wish I might have a chance to tell her how sorry I am."

"Yes," agreed Artemus, "you might ride out to the Quarter Circle H and tell her. And after we get through pickin' the shot out of yore anatomy, you'll still be awful sorry."

"Artemus," said Montgomery, "are you presuming to tell *me* what to do?"

"Well," replied Artemus stoutly, "as long as I'm supposed to learn yuh things about the West, I kinda feel responsible. I feel just as sorry as you do, but I'm not goin' plumb out to the Quarter Circle H, filled with sympathy and come back filled with shot. I *know* Flint Harder."

"What do you think, Mr. Hartley?" asked Montgomery.

"I believe I'd take the advice of Artemus."

They went into the hotel. The two men who had talked with Vincent came across the street. One of them said to Hashknife, "When you found Dean Harder's body, yuh didn't see a horse around there, did yuh?"

"There wasn't any horse in sight," replied Hashknife.

"Uh-huh. We saw yore tracks, where yuh turned him over. They just let him fall, when they knew he was dead, I reckon. I'd hate to be in reach of old Flint Harder, when he finds it out. He hated Jim Martin plenty, before this happened; so he won't hate him any less."

"Old Flint don't have to work hard to hate folks," said the other.

Hashknife said, "Do you gentlemen know a man named Henry Webster?"

They both shook their heads. One said, "I never heard of him. What does he do?"

"I don't know," replied Hashknife. "Did Les Hart work around here?"

"Yeah, he worked for Flint Harder quite a while. I dunno where he went."

"Slim Sherrod worked here, too, didn't he?"

"Yeah, he worked for Harder, too. Slim left here about two months ago. Les left here before that. Do you know 'em?"

"Yeah, we worked with them on the UF spread, down in the Isabella country."

The two men went into the hotel. Hashknife and Sleepy went down to a little restaurant, where everybody was discussing the killing of Dean Harder, and what Flint Harder would do about it. About an hour later they were sitting in front of the hotel

again, enjoying the cool breeze of early evening, when a buckboard team turned down the side street. There were three people on the seat, and one was a woman.

"That's the same rig Sally Harder was drivin'," said Sleepy.

In a few minutes the equipage came back, with only the two men on the seat. It required little deduction to determine that one of them was Flint Harder. He was of medium size, gaunt and grizzled, and with a face so deeply lined that it might have been carved from granite. He cursed his driver, who happened to be Nick Higby, his foreman, for not getting out fast enough, but the big cowboy paid no attention to the profanity.

Harder scowled at Hashknife and Sleepy, as he twisted painfully and got out of the seat, using a heavy cane. Higby started to assist him, but he shoved him aside, swore painfully and managed to reach a seat on the porch. In spite of his

crippled condition, he had on high-heel boots and wore a holstered gun.

Higby spoke quietly to him, and Harder said:

"I don't care what yuh do. Go to hell, as far as I'm concerned."

Nick Higby walked away. Harder shifted his eyes and looked at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Tall and short one, eh? So, you found him, eh?" he growled.

"If it's any of yore business—yes," replied Hashknife calmly.

"Any of my business? Why, damn yore hides, I—I'm Flint Harder!"

"Is that name supposed to scare the children?" asked Sleepy.

"Scare the—" Flint Harder stared at Sleepy. "What are you talkin' about?"

Hashknife looked at Harder and smiled slowly. It infuriated Harder.

"Somethin' damn funny, eh? Man with a busted hip—that's funny."

"Yore son was killed today—and you brag about yore own ailments," said Hashknife quietly. "You should be ashamed."

Flint Harder turned away and looked across the street. Jim Martin, the sheriff, was coming along. Flint Harder saw him, and his right hand slid to the butt of his holstered gun. The sheriff did not look up. Flint Harder slid his gun loose and clicked back the hammer, but Hashknife's left hand clamped vise-like on his wrist, while his right hand tore the gun away. The sheriff stopped and looked at Harder, who was clawing at Hashknife's sleeve, trying to get the gun.

"You damn meddlin' fool!" he rasped.

"No shootin', if yuh please," said Hashknife.

"I came here to kill you, Martin," said Harder, "but this meddlin' fool took my gun."

Jim Martin looked at Hashknife and said quietly, "Give him back his gun—it's all right."

"Two fools don't justify murder," said Hashknife.

"He killed my son," shouted Harder.

"He killed a bank robber," corrected Hashknife.

"He was my daughter's husband," said the sheriff.

"Another killin' won't bring him back—nor help his widow," said Hashknife. "You've both lost—why not bury the hatchet?"

"I'd bury it—in his damned head!"

snarled Harder. "Give me back that gun. This ain't none of yore damn business. He's got a gun."

Hashknife smiled and looked at the sheriff.

"Do you two want to shoot it out?" he asked.

The sheriff looked at Harder and his eyes narrowed.

"Shoot it out with that damn cripple? No! When I shoot it out with a man, I want him physically and mentally right."

The sheriff went on up the street, leaving Flint Harder to squirm in his chair and glare at Hashknife.

When the sheriff was a distance away, Hashknife removed the cartridges from the gun and handed it back to Harder, who shoved it into his holster.

"Just who in hell are you?" he asked.

"I'm the man who kept you from makin' a fool of yourself."

"Pretty smart, eh? Keep yore nose out of my business, or you'll get it shot off."

"Tough people," said Sleepy.

Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Artemus came out of the hotel, and Montgomery came straight to Flint Harder.

"Mr. Vincent told me that you are Mr. Harder," he said. "I am Alexander Hamilton Montgomery, and I wanted to tell you how sorry I am. You see, I was in the bank at the time. To your charming daughter, I should like to have you convey my deepest—"

"Shut up!" roared Flint Harder. "You—you—" Flint Harder's voice sank to a reedy whisper. "Get away from me you—you—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Montgomery. "I didn't realize—come, Artemus."

"I told yuh," said Artemus. "In time, you'll learn."

They went down the street. Flint Harder drew a deep breath.

"I heard about them two," he said. "Artemus! That damn Smoky Day, puttin' on airs. Stole horses for twenty years—and look at him now!"

"Mr. Harder," said Hashknife, "you've lived here a long time, haven't yuh?"

"Too damn long!" snapped Harder.

"Did you ever know a man named Henry Webster?"

"Huh? Henry Webster? What about him?"

"Did you ever know him?" asked Sleepy.

"Maybe you can tell me where I can find him," added Hashknife.

Flint Harder scowled thoughtfully over the question. Finally he said:

"The last time I seen him, I told him to go to hell. If he ain't there, I don't know where you'll find him."

"What business was he in?" asked Hashknife.

"He tried to get into mine. Well, here comes Nick Higby. I'm glad I don't have to set here and listen to you fellers yap any longer. That's the worst of bein' a cripple—yuh can't walk away."

He got to his feet and hobbled out to the buckboard. Sleepy tried to assist him, but he snarled like a wolf:

"When I want help, I'll ask for it. Get to hell out of here, before I shoot somebody."

"That's a bad habit," remarked Hashknife. Flint Harder twisted in his seat and scowled at Hashknife.

"Shootin' people?" he asked.

"No—talkin' about it," replied Hashknife. "You know what they say about barkin' dogs."

Nick Higby seemed on the point of laughter, as he backed the team and turned around. Few ever talked back to Flint Harder.

"At least, we know that there was a man named Henry Webster, Sleepy," remarked Hashknife as they drove away.

"And we know where he was told to go," said Sleepy soberly. "Yuh might write to Bob Marsh and give him the address."

After supper that evening Alexander

Hamilton Montgomery came to Hashknife in the little hotel lobby.

"I have given Artemus the evening off—for drinking purposes," said the young man.

"For drinkin' purposes? I see. Quite an idea. This your first trip West?" asked Hashknife.

"I went to college until they kicked me out. It was my second experience of that kind, and Dad said it was the last. When I suggested coming west for material for a play, Dad was enthusiastic. He is very fond of the theater, you see. He said that if I could write a successful play, he would —well, he mentioned a million dollars."

"Yore father has plenty of money, I reckon."

"Why, yes, I suppose he has. I really can't say how much."

"Why don't yuh ask him for enough to buy a big ranch, and start raisin' cows."

"I never thought of that. By Jove, it would be an experience!"

"On second thought," said Hashknife, "you should wait until you have written that play, and then use yore reward money."

Montgomery nodded slowly. "It might be better. By the way. "Tomorrow Artemus is going to get us each a horse and saddle.

He says I must learn to ride. Perhaps we will go out to the Harder home. I would like to have a talk with Miss Harder, even if her father was rude to me. She needs a friend, they say."

"Who says?" queried Hashknife.

"Why, I heard it in the store. They said her only friend was a Mrs. Long."

"Pardner," said Hashknife, "you take my advice and stay away from that ranch. If she wants you, I'm sure she'll send for yuh."

"But she doesn't even know me, Mr. Hartley."

"That's just it—she might make a mistake."

## III

DANNY LONG rode back from the Dean Harder ranch, where his wife was staying with Nell Harder. Danny and Dean had been friends all their lives, and even after their marriages they were almost inseparable. Danny was badly shocked over the death of Dean Harder, and he was a grim-faced young cowboy, as he rode home that morning. He had tried to explain to Nell that her father was not to be blamed, and Danny's wife had proceeded to berate Danny for the remark, which intimated that Dean was a thief.

Danny rode home, wondering what he should have said. Swede Olson was just leaving the ranch to repair a piece of drift-fence, and saw Danny arrive. Swede waved and rode on. That break in the drift-fence had been there for months. Normally it would have been ignored for more months, but Swede wanted to do something; to get away from arguing over what had happened.

Danny sat on the porch for a few minutes, but suddenly decided to go to town and see what had developed. There would be an inquest, and he wanted to be there. Danny started down to the stable, when a crow alighted on the ridge of the stable and cawed at him, defiantly, it seemed.

"Maybe yo're the bad luck around here," said Danny. He drew his gun and took a snap-shot at the crow, which went away cawing wildly, most of its tail feathers missing. Danny chuckled and went on to get his horse.

Swede Olson heard that shot. He was not too far away to realize that it had been fired at the ranchhouse. There was nothing unusual about the sound of a shot in a country where all men carried guns, but Swede turned his horse around and looked in the direction of the ranchhouse.

"Ay guess Ay am just getting yumpy," he told his horse, and went back.

Danny was not at the house, nor was his

horse. Swede fanned himself with his hat, decided it was too hot to work, anyway, and took his horse down to the stable. He unsaddled, and started to climb up to the hay-loft to toss down some hay, when he happened to notice a surplus of hay already in the manger. The horse snorted a little and pulled back the length of its tie-rope.

Swede came down, shoved past the horse and looked into the manger. Then he shoved some of the hay aside, jerked back quickly and walked to the doorway, where he took off his hat and fanned himself again. Swede's ruddy face was beaded with perspiration.

"Ay vill be damned!" he exclaimed aloud. "Ay yust vill be!"

With fumbling fingers he fished out a small box of snuff from his shirt pocket, and with a sufficient quantity stuffed inside his upper lip, he sat down on the sill and pondered the situation. There was a man stuffed into the manger, and covered with hay.

He had heard the shot that killed the man. Danny had been the only one at the ranch, when the shot was fired. Now, Danny was gone and there was a dead man in the manger. After ten minutes of reflection, Swede said, "Ay vill be damned!"

Evidently he had arrived at a decision. He saddled his horse and put a blindfold over its eyes. Swede Olson was a powerful man. He lifted that body from the manger and placed it across his saddle, while with a lariat he quickly bound it there. Then he led the horse outside and removed the covering from its eyes. Satisfied that the coast was clear, he led the horse through a side gate, and down through the brush, following an old cow trail.

ARTEMUS DAY was having his troubles. He had purchased two horses and saddles for himself and Alexander Hamilton Montgomery, and now he was trying to teach Montgomery the art of equitation.

They weren't riding faster than a slow trot, although Montgomery suggested a faster pace.

"I got yuh up there, and I want yuh to stay a while," declared Artemus. "You'll have plenty time to ride fast, after yuh find out how to stay on."

"There is really nothing to it, once you are on the saddle," said Montgomery.

"Yeah, that's right. Just be sure yuh stay there, until yuh *want* to get off."

Artemus led the way off the road and they traveled cattle trails. The little, bow-legged ex-cowboy pointed out cattle and explained about the brands. He showed Montgomery a coyote, slinking along the side of a hill, hardly more than a shadow in the desert growth; and a desert rattler, taking a siesta in the shade of a bush.

"It is marvelous," sighed Montgomery, "but this saddle becomes rather hard after a while."

"You'll eat like a horse for a few days," said Artemus soberly.

"Like a horse? How is that, Artemus?"

"Standin' up," replied the little cowboy dryly.

They rode around the point of a hill and down through a trail, which led through a forest of mesquite.

They broke into an opening and almost ran into a man, leading a horse. The man stepped back past the horse and ran as fast as he could through the mesquite. For some distance they could hear him running, but the sound died away in the distance. A few mesquite bushes blocked them from a good view of the horse.

He ran away and left his horse," said Montgomery. "Very strange."

"I hope to tell yuh!" Artemus spurred ahead and they rode around to the horse. What they saw caused them to pull up quickly. There was the body of a man roped to the saddle. Artemus dismounted and gingerly approached the animal,

hunched down, as he tried to see the face of the dead man.

"Lon Porter!" he exclaimed. "It's Lon Porter."

"Is he—is he—dead?" faltered Montgomery.

"Deader'n a door-knob," replied Artemus.

"Who is Lon Porter?"

"He—he was a puncher at the Quarter Circle H. Hell, I knowed him a long time. Well, well! It kinda looks like somebody killed him, and was takin' him out to a private buryin' ground."

"You mean—he was murdered? Wha—what are we going to do with him, Artemus? After all, it is none of our affair."

"If we had any sense," said Artemus, "we'd ride away and forget it—but we ain't."

He rode over, picked up the long lead-rope and took a loop around his saddle-horn.

"We're takin' him to town," he said. "I'll take the lead, and you foller. If he falls off, you can pick him up."

"If I do not fall off first," said Montgomery soberly.

DANNY LONG reached Antelope Flats just in time to attend the inquest. He heard Hashknife and Sleepy testify to finding the body, and also heard the sheriff, in a halting voice, tell of firing the shots at the departing outlaws. The banker was unable to identify any of them, nor did anyone seem to remember the colors of the horses they rode. Le Blanc testified that he saw one of the riders sway in his saddle, and saw one of the other riders prevent him from falling.

Neither Flint Harder nor Sally came to the inquest, but Nick Higby and two of their cowboys were in attendance. Jim Martin, the sheriff, was exonerated of any blame in the matter. After the inquest Hashknife was talking with Manana Higgins, the deputy, when Nick Higby came to them and asked if Manana had seen Lon Porter.

"I ain't seen him for a couple days, Nick," replied Manana.

"That's shore funny," remarked Nick. "You don't mean to say yo're so careless that you've lost a cowboy, do yuh?" asked Manana.

"Lost, strayed or stolen," laughed Nick. "He started for town last evenin', and we ain't seen him since."

"Lon is a man-sized drinker," said Manana, "and that might keep him among the missin' for a while; but he'll come home when he gets hungry."

"Yeah, I reckon so," agreed Nick. He turned to Hashknife and said, "I reckon you told Flint Harder a few things yesterday. All the way back to the ranch he was thinkin' up new cuss words to call yuh. He said you stopped him from shootin' Jim Martin."

"Would he have killed Martin?" asked Hashknife.

"I don't know. You never can tell about a man like Harder."

Hashknife and Sleepy sat down in the shade with Manana Higgins.

"Queer man, that Flint Harder," said Manana. "He thinks the whole world is against him."

"A deputy shot him by mistake, they tell me," remarked Hashknife.

"That's right."

"Did it happen here in Lost Horse Valley?"

"It shore did—and Jim Martin was the deputy."

"No wonder he hates Jim Martin."

"Well, it was a mistake, but Harder never believed it—not openly. He's always howlin' about somebody stealin' his cows. Told me he was goin' to ask the association to send in a detective, but if he did, I never seen the detective."

"Do you think he is really losin' cows, or does he just want to yelp about somethin'?"

"I don't know," replied Manana soberly. "I didn't think so, until Bob Reynolds, owner of the Rockin' R, said he was losin' cows, too. I'd believe him quicker than I would Flint Harder."

Danny Long came along, and Manana introduced him to Hashknife and Sleepy. Manana questioned him about Mrs. Dean Harder. Danny said:

"It's awful tough on her, Manana. It's bad enough to have her dead husband branded a thief, but it's worse to know her own father done the shootin'."

"Was Dean short of money?" asked Manana.

"Yeah, he was. We're all hard up, as far as that goes, but I didn't think Dean would go in for that kinda stuff. He didn't run around with a bad gang."

"Wouldn't his father help him out?" asked Hashknife.

"That old sidewinder? Have you met him? I don't know how anybody can hate Nell—but he does a pretty good job of it. Well, I've got to be driftin'. Glad to—"

"My Gawd, what have we here?" blurted Manana.

IT WAS Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Artemus, with the body of Lon Porter. Alexander tried to dismount, caught his right spur in his saddle-skirt, and sat down ungracefully behind his horse. Artemus looked at him in amazement, as he said, "You can find more ways of gettin' off than anybody I ever knew."

Men crowded around them, questioning, arguing. Nick Higby and the sheriff shoved their way to the pack horse. Hashknife and Sleepy stood on the wooden sidewalk, which gave them a view over the heads of the crowd.

Artemus Day was right in his element—the spotlight. He told his story, with gestures. Then the sheriff and Nick Higby took the lead rope and headed for the doctor's home, while the crowd filed in behind, all except Alexander Hamilton Montgomery, who limped over to the sidewalk. Alphabetical Anderson had taken Montgomery's horse to the stable.

"Pardner," said Hashknife to Montgomery, "you seem to have had yore ups and downs today."

"One thing," remarked Sleepy dryly, "when you get off, you get off all in a bunch. Nothin' lingerin'-like in it at all."

"I leave nothing to the imagination," nodded Montgomery. "What an experience! Bringing in a dead man!"

"Artemus seemed to enjoy it," remarked Sleepy.

"I hate to say it," said the young man, "but at times Artemus seems to display a crude sense of humor."

"Was that yore first experience with a horse and saddle?" asked Sleepy.

"Yes. I am afraid to sit down, because I know I shall never get up again, and I am afraid to walk, because I really haven't any control of my limbs. I asked Artemus about it, and he said that is why so many men die out here with their boots on—they can not get them off."

"I've often wondered about that," said Hashknife.

They saw Danny Long ride out of town, and in a few minutes Jim Martin, the sheriff, and Manana Higgins came down there.

"Who owned that Circle JR horse?" asked Hashknife.

"Danny Long," replied Manana. "It's Swede Olson's saddle horse. We've got to find Swede."

"Would there be any reason for Swede killin' Lon Porter?"

Manana shrugged his shoulders. "Lon was shot in the back," he said.

"Did Swede ever have any trouble with the Quarter Circle H outfit?"

"Not personally. Danny and Flint Harder have had words. But everybody has had words with Flint Harder—even you, Hartley."

"That's right."

Manana joined the sheriff in the office, and in a few minutes they got their horses

and headed for the Long ranch. Hashknife and Sleepy helped Montgomery up to the hotel, and were sitting in the shade of the porch, when Swede Olson came to town riding a flea-bitten mule, sans saddle or bridle, with only a rope looped around its nose.

The sheriff's office was closed; so he booted the mule up in front of the hotel.

"Ay vant to see de sheriff," he said nervously. "Ay have been robbed."

"Robbed of what?" asked Hashknife.

"My hurse and saddle. Ay vars fixing fence, and Ay saw a man take my hurse; so Ay had to ride de mule."

"Tie yore mule and set a while," said Sleepy. "The sheriff will be back in an hour or so, I reckon."

Swede craned his neck and looked across the street toward the Prong Horn Saloon.

"T'ank you," he said. "Ay t'ink Ay need some yin."

IN SPITE of the fact that Dean Harder had been shot as a bank robber, it was the biggest funeral ever held in Lost Horse Valley. They came from far and wide, some merely out of curiosity, of course, because they knew the circumstances. The little church was entirely inadequate; so the services were held in the dance hall.

Jim Martin and Flint Harder were there, on opposite sides of the room, paying no attention to those around them. Manana Higgins had said to Hashknife, "The two men who rode with Dean Harder will be there."

Bob Reynolds, owner of the Rocking R, had been pointed out to Hashknife, was sitting just across a narrow aisle, and with him was a huge, flat-faced man, with big, hairy hands. The service started, but Hashknife's mind was too busy to pay attention to the cow-town minister's words. He was trying to identify this big man, trying to remember back to a place and a name.

Mrs. Harder, bowed with grief, was near the casket, but to Hashknife the real mourners were further back in the room—Flint Harder and Jim Martin. They had everything to regret. The minister droned on interminably, and the organist played off-key, but the huge, flat-faced man beside Bob Reynolds never shifted his gaze from the minister.

Finally it was over. Hashknife found Manana outside, and as Reynolds and the big man came out, Hashknife asked about the man.

"That's Mike Lassen, foreman of the Rockin' R," said Manana.

*Lassen!* Something clicked in Hashknife's mind. Mike Lassen. Hashknife and Sleepy were not going to the cemetery. They sat down in front of the hotel, and watched the procession form. Sally Harder rode with Mrs. Harder and Mrs. Long. Bob Reynolds and Mike Lassen mounted near the hotel, and Hashknife asked Sleepy to take a good look at the big man.

"Something familiar about him, but I can't place him," said Sleepy.

The funeral procession got under way. Hashknife slumped in his chair, his eyes thoughtful.

"What about the big man?" queried Sleepy.

"Sleepy, it was about five years ago. One night we stopped at a Ranger headquarters down on the Rio. They had picked up five rustlers, after a gun battle, and they were askin' 'em questions, when we came in. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember that night. Why—I seem to remember somethin' about some of that bunch gettin' away from the Rangers. Three, wasn't it?"

Hashknife nodded slowly. "I believe it was."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Sleepy. "There was a big, hairy—"

"Larsen," said Hashknife.

"That's the one! Larsen. They couldn't make him talk. Man, you've got a memory. What do they call him here?"

"Mike Lassen. He's foreman for the Rockin' R."

"Lovely dove! Foreman, eh? And there's rustlin' bein' done here."

Hashknife nodded slowly. "So they say, Sleepy."

Sleepy sighed and began rolling a cigarette. "But," he said, "we must remember that all we came here for was to find Henry Webster."

"I almost forgot about Henry. We'll have to talk with Flint Harder. I hope he can tell us somethin' about Henry; so we can get out of here."

"You don't hope anythin' of the kind, Hashknife; I know you."

They had been together a long time, these two drifting cowboys and Sleepy knew that Hashknife would never agree to leaving Lost Horse Valley, until he had proved a few things for his own satisfaction. There was no doubt in Sleepy's mind that the telegram from Bob Marsh was only a ruse to get them into the thick of things. And there was no doubt in his mind that Bob Marsh's own detectives had failed. Marsh had wired them to handle an ordinary piece of business, well knowing that Hashknife, once in Lost Horse Valley, and aware of the troubled conditions of that range, would never leave until everything was peaceful again.

Sleepy Stevens analyzed nothing. The surface showings were good enough for Sleepy, who left the digging of details to Hashknife. They did not demand remuneration for their services. They needed little. Home was where they hung their hats, and their destination was somewhere on the other side of a hill. Someone had called them Soldiers of Fortune, but Sleepy declared they were Cowpunchers of Disaster, and that fortune had nothing to do with them. They never bragged of their exploits, nor did they even want thanks.

THEY had not been long in Antelope Flats before Sleepy realized how cleverly Bob Marsh had played his cards. A bank robbery, cattle rustling, troubled ranges and troubled people—plus Henry Webster. Sleepy could tell by the glint in Hashknife's gray eyes that he was gathering and discarding theories, even before he knew any of the people.

Few men ever looked into Hashknife's gray eyes and forgot them. Level, and steel-gray, they seemed to look deep into a man's soul, searching for the truth. Hot-headed gunmen had looked into his eyes, and forgot to draw. But they could be kindly eyes, too, full of humanity and understanding.

Hashknife lighted a cigarette and said quietly, "There's tall hills out east of here, Sleepy—when we find Henry Webster."

"Yeah—when we find him," yawned Sleepy.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON MONTGOMERY was hardly able to walk next day, but he told Artemus to saddle the horses.

"Are yuh sure the heat ain't got yuh?" said Artemus.

"It ain't," replied Montgomery flatly.

"Learnin' fast," grinned Artemus. "Well, it's yore joints—not mine."

The young man had difficulty in getting his left foot up as far as the stirrup, but he gritted his teeth and climbed aboard, adjusting himself gingerly, an expression of pain on his face.

"Where to?" asked Artemus curiously.

"To the Flint Harder ranch, Artemus."

"To the—my Gawd! All right, all right. I know she's pretty and all that, but Old Man Day's little son Artemus has got everythin' to lose and nothin' t' gain. Flint Harder don't like me. Said I'd have been hung long ago if the seat of my pants was heavy enough to break my neck.

"You have nothing to do with me going out there," said Montgomery.

"Yeah, I know that; and I hope you'll explain it to Flint Harder, before he goes into action."

"My goodness, Artemus! One would think that Mr. Harder was an ogre."

"Well, I dunno what that is, but it's all right with me. C'mon."

They rode slowly. Even a slow trot was misery for Montgomery.

"You'll be all right in a couple years. It takes practice," said Artemus soberly.

In spite of the fact that the Quarter Circle H was the biggest spread in Lost Horse Valley, there was nothing pretentious about the group of buildings, hidden away in a grove of huge sycamores. The bunkhouse and part of the ranchhouse was of adobe, and there was a thick adobe wall around the spacious patio. The ranchhouse was two stories high, roofed with home-made tiles.

Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Artemus Day rode up close to the patio gate. Sally Harder, sitting on a rear balcony, overlooking the patio, saw them. Flint Harder was asleep in the main room. Wong, the old Chinese cook and housekeeper, saw them and came to the patio porch.

Nick Higby, the foreman, also saw them, and came up from the stable.

"Who you like see?" asked Wong.

"Will you please tell Mr. Harder that a couple of gentlemen are here to see him?" requested Montgomery.

"Make it one gentleman," said Artemus. "I jist came along."

Nick Higsby came up to them, evidently in bad humor. "What are you doin' here, Day?" he said.

"I—I just came," said Artemus lamely.

"I see yuh did. What do you fellows want, anyway?"

"I would like to see Mr. Harder, if you do not mind," said Montgomery.

"Just suppose Mr. Harder don't want to see yuh," suggested Nick.

"That," replied Montgomery firmly, "is up to Mr. Harder."

"Is that so?" queried Nick. "Mr. Harder don't want to see yuh."

Alexander Hamilton Montgomery dismounted painfully, and Artemus looked upon such action with trepidation.

"If you do not mind," said Montgomery, "I should like to leave that decision to Mr. Harder, rather than to take an opinion from a hired man."

Sally moved a little closer to the railing of the balcony. She knew Artemus Day very well. He gave her an appealing glance, but his too-large hat slid over his eyes. Nick Higby moved in close to Montgomery.

"Listen to me, you damn fool dude," gritted Higby, "I'm foreman of this outfit, and when I tell yuh that Mr. Harder don't want to see yuh . . ."

"I beg your pardon," said Montgomery, "but is it customary for the foreman to do the thinking for the owner?"

Nick Higby closed his jaw tightly for a moment. Then he turned and said to Artemus, "Smoky, take this damn fool off this ranch, before somethin' happens to both of yuh."

Smoky shoved his hat back, shrugged his shoulders, and the hat went back over his eyes. Higby turned back to Montgomery.

"Get back on that horse and get off this ranch," he said, "before I lose my temper and poke you right in the nose."

"I really cannot conceive of any reason why—"

"You asked for it," said Nick, "and you'll get it."

Nick Higby was a one-punch fighter. That is, he threw everything he had in that one punch—and missed. It left him off balance, one fist in the air, as though saluting someone. Alexander Hamilton Montgomery did not miss. It was the same punch that had felled Buck Shell at Isabella—a left-handed uppercut to the chin. Nick Higby landed on his face in the dirt. Wong looked blandly upon the affair, while Artemus Day chuckled hollowly. Sally's eyes were watching Montgomery, and she did not seem angry over Nick's downfall.

"Well," remarked Montgomery, "now that the argument is over, may we see Mr. Harder?"

"Misa Ha'der sleep now," explained Wong. "Plitty soon he wake up. You wait?"

"Thank you—yes, we will wait."

Alexander Hamilton Montgomery lifted his eyes and saw Sally on the balcony. "I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "I—I didn't know you were there."

"Come into the patio," she said.

He left his horse and walked through the gate. Nick Higby sat up, shaking his head, goggling at Artemus, probably wondering what hit him. Sally came down to the patio, before Nick was able to get to his feet. He heard their voices in the patio, but everything seemed very confusing.

"Yore chin will be sore a couple days, Nick," said Artemus.

"Where did he go?" asked Nick huskily.

Artemus jerked a thumb toward the patio. "He's talkin' with Sally. She saw it from that balcony up there."

"Oh!" Nick caressed his chin and stretched his neck muscles. Then he turned and walked back toward the stable, not too steadily. Artemus grinned widely and began rolling a cigarette, but first he hung his hat on the saddle-horn.

Sally and Montgomery were sitting on a long bench, and Montgomery was telling her all about why he came west, and what he expected to do.

"I can understand all that," said Sally, "but why do you want to see my father?"

"As a matter of fact," confessed Montgomery, "I wanted to meet you; so I used your father as an excuse."

"But why go to all that trouble in order to meet me?" she asked.

"It wasn't any trouble, Miss Harder."

"Fighting is no trouble for you, I suppose."

"Fighting? Oh, you mean—out there. Well, it really wasn't any trouble."

"You are accustomed to fighting, I suppose."

"Not at all. In fact I have only hit two men in my life."

"Mr. Montgomery," said Sally quietly, "you are quite a remarkable young man, and I appreciate your efforts in getting a chance to meet me; but I am afraid it has gained you very little."

"I'm sorry," said the young man. "At least, I have met you, and I think you are wonderful; no matter what you think of me. I want you to know I am sorry about your brother. You see, I was in the bank—at the time."

"You saw my brother?" asked Sally quietly.

"I saw three masked men, Miss Harder. I admit that I was frightened and excited, but I did note their general physical make-ups. Was your brother left-handed?"

"No, he was not," declared Sally quickly. "Why do you ask that?"

"The one man who could have been your brother carried a gun in his left hand, Miss Harder."

"Are you sure of that?" she asked anxiously.

"Sure of what?" growled Flint Harder's voice, and they turned to see him in the doorway.

"Dad, I want you to meet Mr. Montgomery," said Sally.

"That damned dude again," muttered Flint Harder. "I didn't believe it, when Wong said that you knocked out Nick Higby."

"I am sorry, Mr. Harder; he struck first."

"Sorry? You poor fool, he's whipped every man he ever fought!"

"Except one, Dad," said Sally.

"That fight prob'ly ain't finished yet," growled Harder. "What do you want out here?"

"Well," faltered Montgomery, "I—I just came out, you see."

"I see yuh did. Well, yuh can turn right around and go back again."

"Wait a moment, Dad," said Sally. "Mr. Montgomery was in the bank, when—when it was robbed. He says that the one

man who could have been Dean held his gun in his left hand."

"Of all that damn—" spluttered Flint Harder, but suddenly sobered. "What was that?" he asked. "Held a gun in his left hand?"

Montgomery nodded. "Your son was under six feet tall, they say. Only one of the three was under six feet tall; and held a gun in his left hand."

Flint Harder scowled thoughtfully at Montgomery.

"You wouldn't know," he said huskily. "You'd be too scared. You're just sayin' that. The evidence—"

"Two gentlemen come see you, Missa Ha'dah," called Wong from the doorway.

"Tell 'em to go to hell," replied Harder.

"Tell 'em yourself," said Hashknife, and they saw him in the patio gateway, with Sleepy behind him.

"Come in," growled Harder. "Wait a minute—we'll go into the house."

They went in through a side doorway, and Harder led the way to the main room. Sleepy was chuckling, and Harder turned on him.

"What's so damn funny?" he asked.

"That dude out in the patio."

"Oh! That *thing!* Dude, eh? Well, he knocked Nick Higby cold a few minutes ago. Wong told me he hit Higby with a left uppercut. Can yuh imagine that?"

"Did you ever hear of Buck Shell, down at Isabella?" asked Sleepy.

"Yeah, I've seen him."

"Well, the dude knocked him out with one punch."

"He did, eh? Well, what do you two want of me?"

"We're lookin' for Henry Webster," replied Hashknife.

"Henry Webster? What do yuh want him for?"

"Do you know who Bob Marsh is?"

"Yeah, I know him."

"He sent us a telegram at Isabella, askin' us to come up here and locate Henry Webster. Bob wants Webster to get in touch with him."

Flint Harder scowled at Hashknife and said:

"Why should I do anythin' for Bob Marsh? Twice I've asked him for help to find out who is stealin' my cattle. Did he help me? He did not. If that's all I mean to his association, I'm through."

"But that don't locate Henry Webster," reminded Hashknife.

"Oh, that smart aleck! He came out here and said he wanted to investigate all my cows for disease. All it would cost would be his board and room for two, three weeks. I told him my cows didn't have any disease. He said they did. Anyway, we had an argument, and I told him to go to hell. He went back to Antelope Flats, and I never saw him again."

"He never came back, eh?"

"I told him I'd shoot his top-knot off if he ever did. The idea! He was just a smart hombre, who wanted to experiment on my cows."

"I see," nodded Hashknife. "How long after yore request from Bob Marsh did Webster come here?"

"How long? Oh, maybe two, three weeks, I reckon."

"Harder," said Hashknife seriously, "did it ever occur to you that Henry

Webster might have been a range detective, sent here by Marsh."

"No. If he was, why in hell did he want to investigate my cows?"

"Did you ever stop to consider that a rustler shoots to kill; and that a man known as a detective would have no chance to find out anythin'—and maybe not live twenty-four hours?"

Flint Harder eyed Hashknife closely for a moment, as he considered the question. Then he said:

"Who in hell are you—askin' all these questions. I know yore name's Hartley—but what's yore business?"

"Punchin' cows," replied Hashknife soberly.

"Is that so? You don't happen to be another pair of Henry Websters, do yuh?"

"Yore cows can all die of the croup, as far as we're concerned," said Sleepy.

"We've heard," said Hashknife, "that the Rockin' R claims to have lost cattle the same as you have."

"I don't care what happens to the Rockin' R. I'm not interested."

"Do you get any pleasure out of life, Mr. Harder?" asked Hashknife.

"Pleasure? That's none of your business. I live as I please."

"Without a friend," added Hashknife.

"Who says I haven't friends?"

"Have yuh?"

Harder glared at Hashknife, but turned away.

"What is a friend?" he asked bluntly.

"My idea of a friend," replied Hashknife, "is a person who knows all about yuh—and still likes yuh."

"That's my idea of a gullible damn fool, Hartley."

"They're nice to have around when things go wrong, Harder."

"When things go wrong?"

"Like yesterday," said Hashknife. "Did any man or woman come to you and say they were sorry? No, they sat away from yuh.

"They didn't want a tongue-lashin'; so they kept away. You got bitter over an accident, and you've nursed that bitterness, until yuh can't speak decently to any man. You're just stubborn enough to go to yore grave, cussin' everythin' and everybody; but all the while, Harder, yo're wishin' you could change and—have a friend."

"Yo're a liar, Hartley. Yore whole idea is wrong."

"Much obliged for the information on Henry Webster," said Hashknife.

THEY walked to the doorway, with Harder glaring at them.

"It's shore nice to have met yuh," said Sleepy, and they rode away.

On their way back to Antelope Flats, he remarked:

"What did I tell yuh about Bob Marsh. All he wanted was for us to find Henry Webster and tell him to write. Bob knew there was trouble here. He sent Henry here, and somethin' happened to Henry. So Bob Marsh, the schemer, figured we'd shy from the job if he told us the truth; so he asked us to pack a message to a man who wasn't here. He knew darn well that as soon as yore long nose poked into things here, nothin' short of dynamite would pry yuh loose."

"I'm still lookin' for Henry Webster," said Hashknife meekly.

"Knowin' we won't find him," added Sleepy.

They stabled their horses and were on their way to the hotel, when two riders drew up at the Prong Horn Saloon.

"We seem to have an old friend among us," observed Sleepy.

"That's right," smiled Hashknife. "Slim Sherrod, ridin' with Mike Lassen, who used to be Larsen. A good pair to draw to, Sleepy. Yuh know, I believe I'll send a telegram to Bob Marsh tonight. I'd like to know somethin'."

"What's that?" queried Sleepy.

"I want to know if Henry Webster was ever a member of the Rangers."

IV

DANNY LONG sat on the porch of his little ranchhouse with his wife, and talked over the troubles of the Harder family.

"I don't know what Nell will do," said Mrs. Long. "Dean had no money to leave her. The price of beef is down, and even if it wasn't, she hasn't anything to market.

Jim Martin has only his salary—and you know how they stand. She would not accept a dime from him."

"Flint Harder could help her," suggested Danny.

"Could you imagine that, Danny?"

"No, I couldn't, May."

From down at the stable came the sounds of a man singing—or trying to sing. It was not very musical. Danny shook his head sadly.

"Swede brought more gin from town," he said. "I can't figure him out. He was only good for one drunk a year—unless he met Alphabet Anderson at a bar. But he's been drunk practically day and night since Dean was killed. Somethin' is wrong with him."

"If he keeps this up, you'll have to fire him, Danny," said Mrs. Long.

"Fire Swede? Gosh, May, I can't do that—unless I have to. Aw, he'll sober up. Why, he'd do anything short of murder for either of us—and I wouldn't bet he'd balk at murder."

Swede led his horse out of the stable and started to saddle. Swede's horse was fifteen years old, sway-backed, with a moth-eaten, buckskin coat, and barely enough energy to break into a lope. Just now Swede was having difficulty in saddling the animal, because of Swede's inebriated condition, not because of the horse.

"What is he waving at?" wondered Mrs. Long.

Danny chuckled. "He's waving at me, I reckon. I'll go down and see what he wants."

Swede was in the saddle, when Danny came up to him.

"Didja want somethin', Swede?" asked Danny.

"Ay vant to tell you somet'ing," said Swede heavily. "Ay vould do anyt'ing for you, Danny. Ay t'ink you are de greatest faller in de vorld, but Ay can only stand it just so long."

"Bad gin," suggested Danny. "But what do you want to tell me?"

Swede leaned down from his saddle, his face red from the exertion.

"Ay yust vant to tell you next time you kill a man—bury him yourself. Ay am t'rough vit being ondertaker."

Swede spurred his ancient steed and went galloping toward the main gate, leaving Danny staring after him, puzzled completely.

Danny went up to the house and sat down on the steps of the porch.

"What did he want, Danny?" asked Mrs. Long.

"I think he's gone crazy," said Danny. "He told me that if I killed another man I must bury him myself, because he is through bein' an undertaker."

"Well, my goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Long. "He must be crazy, Danny."

"I suspect bad gin," sighed Danny.

"He didn't say who you killed, did he?"

"No, he didn't mention any names."

"It really is queer, Danny. Swede never acted crazy before."

"No," replied Danny soberly, "he never did. May, I believe I'll go to town and see what I can hear. You never can tell what Swede might tell—if he has gone loco. And if he is crazy, we don't want him around here, that's a cinch. Yeah, I believe I'll ride in."

SWEDE OLSON came to town and headed straight for the Prong Horn Saloon, where he proceeded to drink one glass of gin after another, until even the bartender looked at him in amazement. Hashknife and Sleepy were in the saloon,

and their attention was attracted to the big Swede.

"Somethin' is wrong with the big fellow," whispered Hashknife. "He's tryin' to drown himself in gin."

"He works for Danny Long," said Sleepy. "Look at that old cap-and-ball six-gun he's packin'."

Hashknife smiled and watched Swede, who finally turned and walked with uncertain steps toward the doorway. The bartender shook his head, as Swede stumbled out on the sidewalk.

"Darn near a quart," said the bartender. "Whooee-e-e, what a thirst!"

SWEDE stood on the sidewalk, adjusted his old sombrero, pointed a finger toward the sheriff's office, as though charting his course, and went into the street. Hashknife and Sleepy, together with several other men, went to the doorway to watch him cross the street.

But Swede had his bearings and went straight to the open door of the office, where he stumbled over the threshold and nearly fell inside. The other men went back, but Hashknife and Sleepy went outside.

Danny Long rode in and tied his horse at the hitch-rack in front of the general store. Then he came across to the saloon. He nodded to Hashknife and Sleepy, as he went in. A few moments later they could hear the bartender telling Danny about Swede's drinking bout. Then Danny came out, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Did you see that Swede drinkin' gin?" he asked.

"Yeah," grinned Sleepy. "What's wrong with him?"

"Well, he's sure actin' funny," replied Danny. "I dunno—"

Jim Martin, the sheriff, came from his office, looked toward the saloon for several moments, before coming across the street.

"Is Swede over at yore office?" asked Danny.

"Yeah, he's over there," replied the sheriff. "Danny, I—I'm sorry as the devil, but I've got to arrest yuh."

Danny jerked back. "Arrest me?" he gasped. "What for, Jim?"

"Swede has charged you with the murder of Lon Porter."

"Lon Porter? Martin, are you jokin'?"

"I wish I was. Swede says you killed Porter and hid the body in a manger. Swede says he took the body away to hide it, but when he met two men he got scared and ran away. He says his conscience wouldn't let him keep still any longer."

"But I never shot Lon Porter," insisted Danny. "That drunken Swede—"

"Danny, I want yuh to go peacefully," said the sheriff. "Maybe Swede is crazy—I dunno. But I've got to arrest yuh."

"I'm not goin' off half-cocked," said Danny grimly. "I'll go with yuh. But that Swede is both drunk and crazy, Jim."

"I hope so, Danny. C'mon."

Hashknife and Sleepy tried to talk with Swede, but he was too drunk to do anything, except wave his arms dismally. Some strong coffee and an hour of sleep put him back on his feet. He was repentant, but stuck doggedly to his story.

"But why would Danny Long shoot Lon Porter?" asked the sheriff.

"Ay am not figure for a reason," sighed Swede. "Ay am so sorry, but Ay could not sleep. Ay am honest faller, you bat you."

The absence of Doctor Jessup had delayed the inquest over Lon Porter, but he came back that day. Hashknife and Sleepy went down to see him, and found the sheriff, Manana and Nick Higby there. Doctor Jessup was about sixty-five years of age, nervous and irritable He seemed to resent Hashknife's questions.

"How long had he been dead when they brought him here?" he snapped. "How do I know? I never heard the shot."

"Was he shot in the back?" asked Hashknife meekly.

"If he was, what difference does that

make? They hang 'em down here, no matter which side they're shot from."

"Guilty or not," said Hashknife dryly.

"What do yuh mean by that?" asked the sheriff.

"All they need is the word of a drunk, who heard the shot."

"He wasn't drunk at that time, Hartley."

"That might make his hearing more acute," said Hashknife.

"What did he mean by that?" asked the sheriff, after they left the house.

No one seemed to know. Nick Higby said, "What's he hornin' in for?"

"Don't look at me," protested Manana. "At least he's smart enough to ask questions. Did yuh ever look him square in the eyes?"

"What for?" asked the sheriff.

"You'll have to answer that one, Jim," said Manana. "Try it some day, when he asks yuh a question, and yo're tryin' to think of a good lie."

"Will that give yuh the right answer?" asked Higby.

"It sure will, Nick; and yore answer will be the truth."

"Yo're crazy," growled the sheriff.

"Yeah, and I'm just as happy as though I had good sense."

Hashknife and Sleepy went back to the hotel, where Andy Vincent gave Hashknife a telegram from Bob Marsh. It read:

HENRY WEBSTER WAS MEMBER TEXAS RANGERS TWO YEARS. LOCATE HIM IF POSSIBLE. REGARDS TO SLEEPY.

"Regards to Sleepy!" snorted Sleepy. "That's sarcasm. Locate him if possible! He knew darn well we couldn't locate him. I wouldn't trust Bob Marsh as far as I could—"

"Throw a bull by the tail," finished Hashknife.

"Uh-huh. A Hereford bull—and by the tail, Hashknife. Now all we've got to do is to find Henry Webster, who used to be a Texas Ranger, and who only stayed here long enough to meet Flint Harder."

"And possibly Saint Peter," added Hashknife.

"Do yuh think somebody killed him?"

"They either did, or they scared him so badly that he ain't quit runnin' long enough to write to Bob Marsh."

"I wish somebody would do that to us," sighed Sleepy.

Artemus Day came across from the Prong Horn Saloon, grinned wryly and sat down with them.

"Where's yore pupil?" asked Sleepy.

"A. H. Montgomery," replied Artemus dryly, "is up in his room, ponderin'."

"Ponderin' what?"

"I dunno. Ever since he talked with Sally Harder, he's been kinda trancelike. He hired me for a hundred a month and my board and room to learn him. Now I've got a new job—lookin' for a left-handed man."

"What kind of a left-handed man?" asked Hashknife.

"He didn't say."

"Have yuh found any yet?" asked Sleepy.

"Not yet."

"Didn't he say why he wanted a left-handed man?" asked Hashknife.

"No, he just said he wanted to find out where there was one."

"I can see his object," said Sleepy dryly. "He's got a right-handed teacher, and now he wants a left-handed teacher; so he can learn both sides of the question."

"Sure," grinned Artemus. "I never thought of that. Maybe I better go up and see how he's comin' along."

Hashknife squinted thoughtfully over his cigarette, after Artemus had gone into the hotel. Why was Montgomery looking for a left-handed man, he wondered? Artemus had said that it was after talking with Sally Harder that Montgomery had asked him to locate a left-handed man. Why?

FLINT HARDER came to town in his buckboard, driven by one of his cowboys. Harder saw Hashknife and Sleepy

and ordered the cowboy to take the team over there. The cowboy tied the team and left Harder in the buckboard. Hashknife and Sleepy nodded to him, paid no further attention to him.

"Hartley, would yuh mind comin' out here?" said Harder finally.

Hashknife walked out and climbed up beside Harder, who said:

"The whole damn town will be wonderin' what we're talkin' about."

"A little serious thought wouldn't hurt any of them," said Hashknife.

"I believe yo're right."

Hashknife laughed. "They say you never agree with anybody."

"I don't care what they say. I got a letter from Bob Marsh."

"About Henry Webster?"

"No—about you."

"Oh!" said Hashknife quietly. "Go ahead."

"Does Bob Marsh always tell the truth, Hartley?"

"Does any man—always?"

"I never met one that did. But if he told half the truth, I can use you."

"Harder, I don't know what he wrote. Me and Sleepy came here to locate Henry Webster for Bob Marsh. We can't do that, it seems; so we might as well drift along."

"I saw Henry Webster once, maybe two months ago. But I'm not interested in Henry Webster. As I said, I can use you two."

"Yo're only short one man," said Hashknife. "Danny Long is in jail, charged with killin' him."

"Danny Long? I didn't know that. How come?"

Hashknife explained about Swede's confession.

"That'll hang Danny Long, Hartley," he declared.

"He hasn't been convicted yet, Harder."

"He will be. Lost Horse Valley don't like murderers."

"Don't Lost Horse Valley believe in justice?"

"Maybe. I believe in an eye for an eye, Hartley."

"Unless it happens to be *your* eye, Harder. But there's no use of us arguin'. I'll drop off here."

"Wait a minute, Hartley. Bob Marsh says you're the only man to handle this rustlin' case. My son was shot for robbin' a bank, and a friend of my son is in jail for killin' one of my best men. You can't help my son, and I don't care a damn about Danny Long; but I do want this rustlin' to stop. Will you take the job?"

"To save yore cows, eh?" said Hashknife slowly. "That's all that means anythin' to you, Harder. You don't care if Danny Long swings, and you don't care what they say about your son. You hate Jim Martin. You admit that the Rockin' R has lost cattle, but you say to hell with them. And you ask me and my pardner to risk our lives to save your cows."

"Then yuh won't take the job, eh?"

"When a man is as mean and narrow-minded as you are, Harder," said Hashknife, "he don't deserve help. Why, I could almost shake hands with the rustler who stole your cows."

HASHKNIFE got out of the buckboard and sat down with Sleepy who had heard some of the conversation. Flint Harder hunched on the buckboard seat, until the cowboy came back across the street.

"We're goin' home, Pete," said Harder.

They drove away. Harder never looked toward Hashknife and Sleepy.

"You made a smart decision," said Sleepy.

"I made a smart talk," smiled Hashknife.

"What do yuh mean, pardner?"

"Flint Harder won't spread the word that we're workin' for him."

"Uh-huh. Yuh don't suspect *his* gang, do yuh, Hashknife?"

"I don't want a bullet in the back from *anybody,* Sleepy."

V

"AY AM hort-sick and sad," declared Swede Olson from the witness stand. "But Ay am honest man and Ay had to tell."

Swede was practically sober. Everybody in Lost Horse Valley came to the inquest. Danny Long's wife sat with him, and only a few seats away was Mrs. Dean Harder. Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Artemus were there to testify, but Swede Olson was the man in the spotlight. No one questioned nor disputed Swede's testimony, until Doctor Jessup excused him, when Hashknife stood up and asked the coroner for the right to question Swede.

"The man has told his story," said the doctor. "I can't see—"

"That's the whole trouble—you don't even try," said Hashknife.

"Let him ask a question, Doc," said the sheriff. "It can't hurt."

"All right," growled the doctor. "I still don't see—"

Hashknife interrupted him with the question:

"Mr. Olson, you say you heard the shot that killed Lon Porter?"

"Ay t'ink it vars de shot, because—"

"You just *think* it was," said Hashknife. "Was your horse tied in that stall, when you took him out that day?"

Swede squinted thoughtfully. "No, he vars not. My hurse vars in de corral."

"Was Danny Long's horse tied in that stall all that night?"

"No, he vars not. Both hurses vars in de corral."

"Mr. Olson," smiled Hashknife, "how long since a horse was fed in that stall?"

"Ay don't know. Maybe t'ree, four days."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Olson, that body could have been there two days, before you found it."

"By Yudas, das is right!"

"That's all, Mr. Olson. Thank you, Doctor."

"But what have you proved?" asked Doctor Jessup.

"I have proved that Danny Long could have shot at the crow as he has testified.

The room buzzed with conversation. All eyes were upon the tall, grave-faced cowboy, who had gained an important point for Danny Long.

Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Artemus were put on the stand, but their testimony made little difference. After a short conference, the six-man jury asked that Danny Long be bound over to the Superior Court and tried for the murder of Lon Porter.

Mrs. Long and Mrs. Dean Harder waited outside for Hashknife, and Manana Higgins introduced them.

"Are you a lawyer, Mr. Hartley?" asked Mrs. Long.

"I didn't like Swede's testimony," said Hashknife. "I believe he is honest, of course, but it was mostly his imagination."

"People around here are liable to believe anything," said Mrs. Harder.

"People are like that everywhere," said Hashknife. "Lost Horse Valley is no exception, Mrs. Harder. I wish you would have a talk with your father. After all, yo're his daughter. Why, a pleasant word from you would make a new man of him."

"He's aged twenty years," sighed Manana.

"I—I don't believe he wants to talk with me," said Mrs. Harder.

"Don't you believe it," said Hashknife quickly. "You try it, Ma'am."

Hashknife and Sleepy went over to the Prong Horn Saloon, where a crowd of men were discussing the inquest. Hashknife realized that his questioning of Swede Olson would cause plenty of comment. Slim Sherrod and Mike Lassen, foreman of the Rocking R, were at the bar, and Sherrod was saying:

"Yeah, he likes to shoot off his face. Me and him was with the UF outfit together. Some folks might think he was smart, but personally, I think he is just an ignorant,

long-legged puncher, who can't keep his mouth shut."

There was no buzz of comment over this statement, and Slim Sherrod realized it. He turned his head slightly and saw Hashknife and Sleepy.

The crowd watched quietly. Slim's right foot slipped off the bar-rail, and his spur jingled loudly.

"Keep on talkin', Slim; you sound interestin'," said Hashknife.

Slim jerked around, feigning amazement at seeing Hashknife."

"Oh, hello, Hartley!" he exclaimed. "Well! Do yuh like this country better than the Isabella range?"

"Any country is all right," replied Hashknife. "It's the people that ruin it."

"Yeah, that's right," agreed the embarrassed Slim. "I—I'm with the Rockin' R now. I'd like to have yuh meet Mike Lassen, the foreman."

Lassen said, "Hyah," but with little enthusiasm.

The pause was embarrassing. Slim tried to grin, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, how are yuh, anyway?"

Hashknife did not reply. Slim said, "Hello, Sleepy; I didn't see yuh."

"I'm kinda transparent," said Sleepy quietly. "At times yuh have to look real close to see me at all."

"Slim," said Hashknife quietly, "you didn't happen to be speakin' about me, as we came in, did yuh?"

"Slim was on the spot. Too many men had heard him for him to make any denial.

"Aw, you know how it is. Yuh say things like that—well, kinda off-handed thataway, and—well, you know—"

"No, I didn't know," denied Hashknife.

Lassen turned from the bar and faced Hashknife.

"Are you tryin' to start trouble?" he asked harshly.

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Larson! I thought Slim said Lassen. Last time I seen you was down on the Rio."

Lassen's jaw sagged for a moment, but he regained his nerve quickly.

"The name is Lassen," he said. "I never seen you before in my life."

Hashknife ignored him, and turned to Slim Sherrod.

"What became of Les Hart?" he asked.

"Les Hart? Why he—"

Lassen shoved Slim aside and faced Hashknife. Lassen's right hand was tensed above the butt of his holstered gun.

"My name's Lassen, Hartley," he said huskily. "Do yuh understand that?"

It was a tense moment, and there was not a sound in the saloon. Then a front window sprayed glass, and the glasses and bottles along the back-bar erupted in a shower of glass. Hashknife ducked and Mike Lassen dived straight ahead, right across the shoulder of Hashknife who heaved up, throwing Lassen over his shoulder, and the big foreman of the Rocking R landed on his head and shoulders on the floor.

It seemed that everyone was diving for cover. A card table upset, and a shower of poker-chips rattled across the floor. Strangely enough the report of the shot was so muffled that few even heard it. But there had been plenty havoc along the back-bar, and the bartender was flat on the floor, trying to reach up and dislodge a sawed-off shotgun from an upper shelf of the bar.

"Where did that come from?" asked an awe-struck gambler. No one knew.

Mike Lassen was trying to pump air back into his aching lungs. Hashknife leaned against the bar, a twisted smile on his lips, as he kept an eye on Lassen. The bartender got up gingerly and looked at his wrecked back-bar.

Mike Lassen tried to draw his gun, and managed to get it out of his holster, but Sleepy kicked it out of his hand, and it slid under a table.

"Yuh can't depend on anybody nowdays," said Sleepy calmly.

Hashknife and Sleepy walked outside,

and the crowd followed them. Artemus Day was coming across from the hotel, walking slowly. He stopped near the sidewalk, where he cuffed his hat back and looked at the crowd.

"Mr. Montgomery asked me to apologize," he said slowly. "Yuh see, he—he was practicin', and he thought his six-shooter would stay cocked—but it didn't."

"Up in his room?" asked Sleepy.

"Uh-huh—with the window open."

"That damn fool dude!" exploded the sheriff. "That gun won't never stay cocked."

"He knows it," said Artemus blandly.

THE crowd went back into the saloon, but Hashknife and Sleepy walked back to the hotel with Artemus.

"Yuh see," explained Artemus, "Mr. Montgomery owns a pair of glasses that are so strong that yuh can see a fly on a stable a mile away. From our window we can look square into the Prong Horn Saloon."

"Meanin' which?" asked Sleepy.

"Well, yuh see, that Mike Lassen is awful fast with a gun."

"He is, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"Uh-huh. I was a-lookin' through the glasses, personally, and it kinda—well—"

Hashknife smiled slowly. "And you saw us about to lock horns, eh?"

"Well, I—I kinda thought—yuh see, if a man's attention is attracted to somethin' else, he might kinda forget—"

"In other words," said Hashknife, "it was yore gun—not Montgomery's."

"Yore guess is as good as any," grinned Artemus. "I don't like him either—and I didn't know how fast you are with a gun."

"I sure appreciate that, Artemus," said Hashknife soberly. "Yo're all right, pardner. Did you find that left-handed man?"

"No, I ain't yet. Well, I'll have to go back and tell the boss that everythin' is all right. See yuh later."

"Much obliged, Artemus," said Hashknife. "If we meet a left-handed man, we'll let yuh know."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy rode out to Danny Long's ranch next day. Swede Olson was working at the corral, and came out to meet them.

"Are you workin' here?" asked Hashknife.

"Yah," nodded Swede. "Ay told Mrs. Long Ay had to do somet'ing to pay her back. Ay feel awful bad about Danny."

"After all, Swede, you did the right thing."

"Ay am honest, but Ay am also a damn fule."

Mrs. Harder was with Mrs. Long, and they came out on the porch.

"I was in town early to see Danny," said Mrs. Long. "There will not be a term of court for over a month. Danny was very grateful to you for your questions at the inquest, and he wants to talk with you."

"I'll see him," said Hashknife. "So Swede came back to work, eh?"

"I couldn't pay him anything, but he insisted on working. He blames himself for all our trouble."

Hashknife turned to Mrs. Harder. "I'd like to ask a few questions about yore husband," he said quietly. "I know it must be painful, but I—"

"What can be talked about?" she asked bitterly.

"Oh, a few things. I don't need to ask you if Dean needed money."

"We did need money," she said. "Who doesn't? But he wouldn't rob a bank. His father wouldn't give us a cent, and my father—don't you understand? He and Flint Harder hated each other. When Dean and I ran away and got married, they both disowned us. I think they hated each other worse than ever after that. I can't go back to my dad and ask for help."

"You don't hate your dad, do you?" asked Hashknife.

Tears came into her eyes and she turned away.

"All right," said Hashknife. "He may hate Flint Harder, but he don't hate you. I believe he'd help yuh, if yuh asked him."

The two women were silent for a while, and then Mrs. Long said:

"Nell, why don't you tell him what happened?"

"It was in the mail today," said Mrs. Harder. "Two hundred dollars, and nothing to show who sent it. It had been mailed at Antelope Flats."

"That was sure nice," said Hashknife.

"Do you suppose my father sent it?"

"You will have to make yore own guesses, Mrs. Harder."

Hashknife questioned her on Dean's actions at home on the day of the bank robbery.

"Dean went away early that day," she said. "He was depressed over money, and he said he was going to see his father. The last thing he said was, 'Honey, he can't any more than throw me off the ranch.' "

"Did he go to the ranch and see his father?"

"No, he didn't. I asked Nick Higby, and he said that Dean did not come to the ranch that day."

"Here comes the dude and his valet," said Sleepy.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON MONTGOMERY and Artemus rode up to the porch.

The two women knew Artemus, except they called him Smoky. He introduced them to Montgomery.

"We were just riding around," said Montgomery. "I find it very exhilarating, since I am getting used to the saddle."

"I heard that you are a writer," said Mrs. Long.

"Still in embryo," smiled Montgomery.

"He means," explained Artemus, "he ain't hatched yet."

"Artemus!" exclaimed Montgomery.

"Well, that's how yuh explained it to me."

"I suppose it is all right, except that it makes me sort of an egg."

Hashknife laughed and got to his feet. "I believe we will go back to town. I'll drop in and see Danny, Mrs. Long."

"Thank you—he will be very glad to see you both."

"If you don't mind," said Montgomery, "we will ride back with you."

"The more the merrier," grinned Sleepy.

"Is it possible to cut across the hills to town?" asked Hashknife.

Mrs. Long went to the corner of the porch and pointed across the hills.

"Go around the stable and across the dry wash, and you will find a trail, which leads to the canyon. It is a deep canyon, but not very long. If you circle the head of it, you will strike another trail, which will take you direct to Antelope Flats. Danny used to go that way most of the time."

"I know the trail," said Artemus. "Been over it lots of times."

"It will be an adventure for me," said Montgomery. "I have never been off a street or a traveled road in my life."

They found the old trail beyond the dry-wash, where they strung out in single file, with Artemus leading the way, until they reached the rim of the canyon. The canyon was about two hundred feet wide at that point, and about a hundred feet deep.

They drew up on the rim and let their horses rest. Cattle grazed on the opposite rim. Somewhere a quail lookout for a covey sent his call echoing across the canyon. A cotton-tail came down among the rocks, but froze at the sight of the four riders.

"Simply gorgeous!" exclaimed Montgomery. "I had no idea."

"Yeah, it's pretty," agreed Sleepy, and reached down to scratch a match on his boot-sole.

Possibly that sudden action saved his

life. As he leaned down, a bullet slit a hole in the crown of his sombrero, tore through a fold of Montgomery's shirt, and smashed up, on a rock behind them. Sleepy merely let loose and landed on the ground. Hashknife and Artemus were out of their saddles in a flash, yelling at Montgomery to get down. He did—ungracefully, but well, and Hashknife fairly shoved him flat.

"Hurt, pardner?" asked Hashknife quickly.

"Skinned knee," replied Sleepy. "Ventilated my hat, too."

Another bullet whined off the rock behind them.

"They're usin' rifles; we better hunt a hole," said Hashknife.

"What is it?" asked Montgomery anxiously.

"It ain't an accident," replied Artemus, as another bullet screamed off a rock.

"But I do not understand," protested Montgomery. "We haven't done anything."

"They don't know it," said Sleepy dryly. "C'mon, we'll get into that crevice. It'll give us a chance to use our guns, if they come close."

Another bullet threw rock dust into Sleepy's eyes, and he swore angrily, as he slid into the crevice. Artemus was alternately lifting and ducking, a cocked revolver in his right hand.

"Hold still, you darned sandpiper!" snapped Sleepy. "Keep yore head down, will yuh?"

"We've got to get lower," said Hashknife calmly. "They can circle the top of this crevice and blast us out with their rifles."

"You can't!" wailed Artemus. "You'd fall into the canyon."

"Take a look, Sleepy," said Hashknife.

Sleepy went crawling down the crevice, while Hashknife kept watch. Montgomery was thoroughly frightened. Someone was trying to get through some brush above a pile of rocks. Two more shots hummed off the rim of their crevice, showing that the attackers were getting almost high enough to rake their position.

"Them dad burned dry-gulchers!" complained Artemus, and ducked, when a bullet almost parted his hair.

Hashknife got a glimpse of one of the men. He had reached the spot in the rocks, but was blocked by some heavy brush. He started to part it with his gun-barrel, when Hashknife lifted his six-shooter and

squeezed the trigger. There was a convulsive movement in the brush, and the clang of metal on stone, as his rifle fell among the rocks.

"C'mon down here—it's a cinch!" Sleepy was calling.

"Get down there," ordered Hashknife. "I'll hold 'em back."

Montgomery and Artemus scuttled down the crevice. Hashknife saw a bush wiggling, and smashed two bullets through it, before he followed. What seemed to be the end of the crevice was a broken ledge, two feet below the rim, where a man might crawl to other ledges, protected by an overhang of sandstone. In order to follow up their attack, they would have to expose themselves on that rim, where the six-shooter would have the advantage.

Sleepy was rolling a cigarette, with Montgomery and Artemus close to him.

"Didja hit anythin'?" he asked, as Hashknife came over to them.

"I got one of them, Sleepy. At least, he fell in the brush and dropped his rifle."

"My God!" exclaimed Montgomery. "You killed a man?"

"They tried to kill us," replied Hash-

knife calmly. "If yuh don't believe it, take a look at the hole in yore shirt."

"I know—but it's terrible just the same."

"Do yuh wish yuh was safe at home?" asked Sleepy.

"I—well—come to think of it—no."

"Salty as a codfish," said Artemus. "Yo're learnin'."

Hashknife sniffed audibly. "Do you smell anythin'?" he asked.

"Buzzards," said Sleepy. "Must be a roostin' place near here."

"Might be. I just wonder—"

"Wonder what?" asked Sleepy.

"You watch the end of that crevice," said Hashknife. "I'm goin' to take a look."

Hashknife worked his way past them on the ledge and crawled further along under the rocky overhang, where there was sort of a cave.

There he stopped and studied an object. It was hardly more than the skeleton of a man, with most of the clothing torn away. Buzzards had made identification impossible. As Hashknife examined the remains, several more rifle shots echoed back from the canyon walls.

Hashknife crawled quickly back to the others, who were intently watching the crevice. In a few moments they heard a voice calling:

"Which way did they go, Manana?"

"Around the rim of the canyon, Jim!" yelled Manana Higgins.

Hashknife scrambled up with the others following. The sheriff and deputy were near there, watching the rim of the canyon, both men armed with rifles. They jerked around at sight of Hashknife and the others.

"I'm damned!" snorted Manana. "Like four gophers!"

"Who was doin' all the shootin'?" asked the sheriff.

"I only saw one of 'em," replied Hashknife.

"How many did you fellers see?" asked Sleepy.

"I saw two of 'em, goin' like hell," said Manana.

"There were three different rifles," said Hashknife, "which makes me a pretty fair shot. C'mon."

Hashknife led the way up through the brush, where he had seen the man—and the man was still there, sprawled across a rock, his rifle below him. The sheriff shoved through the brush and dragged the man out.

"Les Hart!" he exclaimed. "That's who it is—Les Hart."

"Do yuh know him, Hashknife?" asked Manana.

"He was with the UF," said Hashknife, "and he was Slim Sherrod's bunkie."

"Why would he try to kill you?" asked the sheriff curiously.

"I wish I knew the answer to that one," replied Hashknife. "How did you two happen along?"

"We heard the shootin' from the road," replied the sheriff, "so we came to find out. They took a couple shots at us, too. But why would they be waitin' here for you fellers?"

"Very simple," replied Hashknife. "They were staked out along the road, with one of 'em watchin' Long's ranch-house. When we cut through the hills they tried to cut us off. There's somethin' else I want to show yuh, Sheriff. The rest of yuh stay here."

Hashknife took the sheriff down to the skeleton, while the rest of them watched for signs of the other two men.

"Was you and the sheriff goin' out to Long's place?" asked Sleepy.

"Yeah," drawled Manana. "Danny said he needed some clean clothes; so we rode out to get 'em."

"My regards to a dirty shirt," said Sleepy soberly.

Hashknife and the sheriff came back, bringing a piece of cloth from the suit the man had worn. It was dirty and torn, but that was their only hope of identification.

They roped the body of Les Hart on the sheriff's saddle, and he and Manana rode double to Antelope Flats, where their coming created quite a sensation. No one seemed to know that Les Hart had come back to the valley. The crowd followed down to the doctor's home, but Hashknife saw Flint Harder in his buckboard, and went over to him.

"Who's the corpse?" asked Harder gruffly.

"Les Hart," replied Hashknife.

"Les Hart? Why—when did he come back here?"

"I don't know, Harder."

"Shot?"

"Yeah. Him and couple more men were tryin' to kill us over at the canyon between here and the Long ranch. I got Hart."

"Why were they shootin' at you, Hartley?"

"Yuh can't get an answer from a dead man—and the other two got away. Harder, I wonder if you can remember how Henry Webster was dressed."

"Dressed? Huh! I don't remember. Store clothes, I reckon."

Hashknife spread the piece of dirty cloth on his knee, and Harder looked at it closely.

"I believe he wore that kind of a suit," said Harder. "Kinda green and gray, mixed. Yeah, I remember it now."

"And he wore shoes instead of boots?"

"That's right—shoes."

"Henry Webster," said Hashknife, "was shot between the eyes, and cached away on a ledge in that canyon between here and Danny Long's ranch."

Flint Harder eased his crippled hip to a more comfortable position.

"How did you happen to find him?" he asked.

Hashknife explained about the attack at the canyon, and how he found the remains. Harder listened, his lips set in a grim line.

"So Webster *was* a range detective," he muttered. "Somebody knew him. But I don't figure out Les Hart."

"Hart and Sherrod were both with us on the UF," said Hashknife. "They were still there, when we left the outfit at Isabella, and they both knew that we were comin' up here."

Flint Harder nodded slowly. "Now that you've found Henry Webster—are yuh leavin' the valley?"

"I suppose we'll drift along pretty soon, Harder."

Flint Harder took a folded piece of yellow paper from his pocket and handed it to Hashknife. It was a telegram to Harder from Bob Marsh, and it said:

LEAVE EVERYTHING TO HARTLEY.

Hashknife gave the telegram back to Harder, his face grave.

"Has anybody else read that?" he asked.

"Only me and Nick Higby."

"Do you trust Nick Higby?" asked Hashknife.

"Trust him?" Harder swore feelingly. "Certainly I trust him. He's my foreman. What are yuh drivin' at, Hartley?"

"Just this," replied Hashknife quietly. "You are losin' cattle and the Rockin' R are losin' cattle. One range detective has been murdered. Today I had to kill a drygulcher, who used to work for you. Is it any wonder I ask who you can trust?"

"I don't suppose you'd even trust me."

"Not an inch—when my life depended on it."

"Much obliged," said Harder dryly. "I appreciate that."

Hashknife started away, but went back to Harder.

"Hang onto yore temper," said Hashknife, "because I'm goin' to ask yuh a question, and I want an honest answer."

"You said you wouldn't trust me an inch," reminded Harder.

Their eyes met for a moment, and Hashknife said, "I expect an honest answer, Harder."

"Go ahead," growled Harder.

"On the day yore son was killed, did he come to the ranch, askin' you for money?"

"That's none of yore business. Why do yuh ask?"

"I need the correct answer, Harder."

The old cattleman's face hardened and he was about to refuse to answer, but Hashknife said:

"What time did he come out there that day?"

"I don't know what time it was. It—" Harder stopped and drew a deep breath. "Trickled me, eh? All right, damn yuh, he did come. I don't know what time it was. I never carry a watch, and that damn Wong busted my clock. I was asleep when he came; so I don't know what time it was."

"Was Nick Higby at the ranch, when Dean came?"

"Higby? What's he got to do with it? Suppose he was—what then? Are you tryin' to drag Nick Higby into somethin'?"

"Much obliged," said Hashknife.

"To hell with you and yore questions," growled Harder, as Hashknife walked away.

Hashknife smiled to himself. If Nick Higby *was* there, he had lied when he told Dean Harder's wife that Dean never came there that day. Why would Higby lie about a thing like that, he wondered.

WHEN the sheriff and coroner went out to get the remains of the skeleton in the canyon, they brought back Les Hart's horse. It was the same horse Les had ridden with the UF outfit, and was branded with a Circle JR on its left shoulder. Hashknife asked Manana about that brand, and was told that it was located about a hundred miles east of Antelope Flats, and in another county.

"It belongs to Jack Rett," said Manana. "That's a wide country over there, and the spreads are far apart. They have to drive about twenty-five miles to a sidin' on the railroad. They tell me that Rett has a fair-sized outfit."

"Is there a road from here?" asked Hashknife.

"No road, but yuh can go through the hills. Yuh can make it easy in two days."

Hashknife and Sleepy went down to the little depot, where Hashknife wired Bob Marsh:

THINK WE LOCATED HENRY WEBSTER BUT THE BUZZARDS GOT THERE FIRST. WIRE DISPOSITION OF REMAINS TO SHERIFF THIS TOWN.

"Is your name Hartley?" asked the sleepy-eyed agent.

Hashknife nodded and the agent handed him a telegram from Bob Marsh, which read:

IMPORTANT YOU SEE BOB REYNOLDS. REGARDS TO SLEEPY.

Sleepy snorted in disgust. "Are we goin' out to meet Mr. Reynolds?"

"Nope. Early in the mornin', we're goin' ridin', Sleepy."

"Yeah? Any special place?"

"No—just ridin', Sleepy."

"Uh-huh. How'd it be if we ask the sheriff for a couple rifles to take ridin' with us?"

"They might come in handy, pardner. I want to have a little talk with Danny Long, too. We might pick up a snack of food at the restaurant to take along."

"Just a innocent little picnic, eh?" smiled Sleepy.

## VI

WHEN Flint Harder ate supper with his cowboys there was rarely any more conversation than needed. It only required a spark to send Harder into a conflagration. Tonight he seemed more grim than usual. He had been talking with Nick Higby, and Nick admitted the loss of more cattle. As Wong piled smoking dishes on the table, Harder said:

"For the last time, I'm tellin' you boys that this rustlin' has got to stop. If it don't, I'll fire every damn one of yuh, and get a new crew."

Flint Harder glared around the table,

and waited for this to sink in. None of the cowboys looked at him. Finally he said:

"I reckon yuh all know that Hartley killed Les Hart, when Hart and two other men was tryin' to kill Hartley."

"That's what Hartley *says,*" remarked Pete Soboba.

"There's no question about what happened," said Harder. "What in hell was Les Hart doin' here?"

No one seemed to know the answer.

"I saw Slim Sherrod, from the Rockin' R," Higby said, "and he said he hadn't seen Les since he left the UF."

"Sherrod," said Harder, "would lie, when the truth would serve him better. Now I want yuh all to understand this. About two months ago a man who said his name was Henry Webster, came out here. He claimed to be a veterinary. He wasn't —he was an association detective, sent here at my request. I didn't know it. Today, Hartley found the remains of Henry Webster on a ledge of the canyon over by Long's ranch. The man had been shot through the head, and left for the buzzards. There was enough of his clothes left for me to identify him."

"That's the man Hartley and Stevens were lookin' for," said Higby.

"That's what they say," nodded Harder. "I got a telegram from the association sayin' that Hartley is better than any man they've got. I asked Hartley to take this job, and he told me to go to hell."

"I've heard about Hashknife Hartley," said Bill Nichols. "I was with the SK spread, over in New Mexico, and one of the boys mentioned that Hashknife Hartley was in town. Next mornin' we was two men short."

"*Mucho malo hombre,* eh?" queried Pete.

"They tell me," replied Nichols, "that he don't just use his head to wear a hat on."

"Well, this cattle rustlin' has got to stop," declared Harder. "I'm not able to take a gun and ride on their trail. I've got to set here and listen to you fellers prove an alibi. Hartley won't take the job. At least, he is honest. I've taken more off him than off any man I ever met—and liked it. I'm not quittin' on him—not as long as he's in this valley."

"Maybe he's scared to take the job," suggested Pete Soboba.

"Yuh think so, do yuh?" rasped Harder. "I'd like to have yuh meet him and tell *him* that."

"Hell, I'm not pickin' trouble for myself," laughed Pete.

"Look what he done to Mike Lassen in the Prong Horn," said Nichols. "When that fool tenderfoot smashed a bullet into the back-bar, Hartley threw Lassen over his shoulder and damn near killed the big ape."

Wong filled the pot with more steaming mulligan.

"Maybe Hartley is workin' on the murder of Webster," Nichols said.

"I don't know," said Flint Harder. "He came to me and asked me if Dean came out here to get money from me the day he was shot."

Higby looked up quickly. "What'd he ask that for?"

"I don't know. He even wanted to know what time he got here."

Nichols laughed. "It was sure funny the way he twisted up Swede Olson at that inquest. He's nobody's fool, that Hartley."

"He's nosey, that's a cinch," said Pete.

"I hope he keeps on bein' nosey," said Harder. "Maybe if he gets nosey enough I can save some cows."

"That's right," agreed Nick Higby, "but I never had much faith in a range detective."

"Hartley ain't a range detective," said Harder. "Bob Marsh said he's not workin' for the association, but that he's smarter than any men they've got on the pay-roll."

"What about that damn dude?" laughed Pete.

"Maybe he's a detective," suggested

Nichols. "I saw Smoky Day today. The dude calls him Artemus. Smoky came to me and asked me if I knew any left-handed punchers in the valley. I didn't happen to know any. He said his boss wanted him to find one."

"A left-handed cowboy?" queried Higby.

"That's what Smoky said, Nick."

"That's damn funny," said Flint Harder. "Why in the devil does he want a *left-handed* cowboy?"

"I don't believe Smoky knows why," smiled Nichols. "I can't think of one, can you, Nick?"

"I ain't that interested in the wants of that dude," growled Higby.

"He might be a detective, at that," said Nichols soberly.

"Les Hart might have been shootin' at him, instead of at Hartley. The dude got a bullet through his shirt, they say, and Sleepy Stevens got one through his hat."

"I'd believe anythin', after Henry Webster turned out to be one," said Flint Harder. "Bill, will you hitch up the buckboard team and take me to town? I want to talk with Hartley."

"Right away," replied Bill Nichols.

ARTEMUS "Smoky" Day leaned against the end of the bar at the Prong Horn Saloon, as nonchalant as a man could be, who had a hat several sizes too large. Artemus was still looking for a left-handed cowboy, and Alexander Hamilton Montgomery had told him to stay on the job until he found one. They seemed very scarce around Antelope Flats.

Suddenly Artemus stiffened. Several cowboys were coming in, their spurs raking across the rough floor as they came up to the bar. Artemus drew a deep breath. One of those cowboys wore his gun on the left side, with the butt to the rear, indicating that the man did not use a cross-draw.

Artemus shoved away from the bar and went across the street, where he hurried upstairs in the hotel. Alexander Hamilton Montgomery was writing a letter, when Artemus surged in.

"I've done got yuh a left-hander!" he blurted.

"You have? Good work, Artemus. Show him to me, please."

They hurried down the stairs and went across the street to the saloon. Through a front window Artemus pointed out his discovery. Montgomery seemed pleased.

"His name's Ed North, and he's from the Rockin' R," said Artemus.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Montgomery. "Very, very well done, Artemus!"

"Now," said Artemus, "that we've found him, what do I do next?"

"I don't exactly know," replied Montgomery. "Wait! Do you know where we may find Mr. Hartley?"

"He's gone," said Artemus. "Him and Sleepy rode away an hour ago."

"And just when I wanted him," sighed Montgomery. "I don't—I have it! I shall ride out and see Miss Harder!"

"Uh-huh," said Artemus. "I spend two days, lookin' for a left-handed cow-waddie, and after I find one—you go courtin'."

"I am not courting, Artemus," said Montgomery severely. "This is serious. I must see her at once. You will stay here."

"And keep lookin' for another left-handed puncher; so you'll have a set."

"An excellent idea, Artemus; you have great initiative. Come and help me saddle my horse."

Flint Harder and Bill Nichols came to Antelope Flats, and Nichols searched for Hashknife, but with no success. He found Manana Higgins, who told him that Hashknife and Sleepy had left about dark, and had borrowed two rifles from the sheriff's office. They had not told anyone where they were going. Nichols reported this to Flint Harder.

Artemus Day came back from the stable. Flint Harder was sitting in his buckboard in front of the hotel, as Artemus went past.

"Smoky!" said Flint.

Artemus jerked around and came haltingly back to the edge of the sidewalk. "You called, Mr. Harder?" he asked.

"C'mere, you bow-legged scorpion," growled Harder.

"I—I'm close enough," said Artemus.

"All right. Where did Hartley and his pardner go?"

"I dunno, Mr. Harder; they just went."

"I see. Where's yore dude? Ain't yuh afraid you'll lose him?"

"No, sir; he knows the road out to yore place."

"Out to my place? You mean—Smoky, did that—"

"I never said he did. I just said he knowed the road out there."

"Oh, yuh did, eh? Find Bill Nichols for me—right now!"

"I'm workin' for Mr. Montgomery," said Artemus bravely. "You hire yore own valets."

Then the brave Artemus walked into the hotel and went upstairs.

"I sure told him," muttered Artemus as he yanked open the door of his room and walked inside. Then he stopped short. Someone shut the door behind him. A voice said:

"Don't move!"

"I—I won't," declared Artemus.

The barrel of a gun was shoved into his ribs, and he shrank back.

"Hold still, you little rat," rasped a harsh voice. "Where's the dude?"

"I don't know," wailed Artemus.

"Yo're a liar, Day! Where's the dude?"

Artemus tried to think up a plausible lie, but the pressure of that gun was too heavy.

"He's gone," he said.

"Gone where? You better not lie, or this gun will go off."

Artemus capitulated. "He—he went out to the Harder ranch."

"He did, eh? What for?"

"I dunno why," said Artemus.

"You lie! Why did he go out there?"

Another man knocked Artemus' hat off, and grasped him by the hair. It was not pleasant, having a burly handful of fingers twist into his hair.

"What was this talk about you lookin' for a left-handed man?" asked another voice.

"I don't know," whined Artemus. "I—I just looked. He wanted me to find one."

"Is this dude a detective?"

Artemus wanted to laugh. Alexander Hamilton Montgomery, a detective! He tried to frame a good answer, but his hair was on the point of pulling out of his scalp. A voice said:

"Scratch a match."

Someone lighted a match, and a moment later a huge fist crashed into Artemus' jaw, driving his head against the wall, and his light went out. A few moments later his door was closed quietly, and several men went down the hallway, where they turned to an outside stairway and left the hotel.

## VII

ALEXANDER HAMILTON MONTGOMERY did not hurry. In fact, he was not taking any chances on falling off his horse. He knew his limitations. But he was anxious to see Sally Harder and tell her about the left-handed cowboy, who was about the same size as her brother had been.

He reached the ranchhouse and rode up close to the house. There was a light in the main room.

Sally answered his knock on the front door, and admitted him.

She glanced past him, expecting to see Artemus Day, but Montgomery closed the door.

"Did you come alone?" she asked. He nodded quickly. "I thought it would be better, he said. "Miss Harder, I have found the left-handed cowboy."

"Who is it?" she asked quickly, anxiously.

"His name is Ed North."

"Ed North? With the Rockin' R?"

"Exactly. He is just the right size, too."

Sally hesitated, hardly knowing what to do.

"Is your father home?" asked Montgomery. Sally shook her head.

"He went to town," she said. "But he wouldn't help, because he wouldn't believe you. The sheriff might, but—we'll see Mr. Blair, the prosecuting attorney. He will help us, Mr. Montgomery."

"Why don't you call me Monty?"

"It might shorten things," she said dryly. "I'll get a hat. Luckily my horse is in the stable."

ARTEMUS DAY regained consciousness in that dark room, crawled into the hallway and got to his feet. The whole episode was clear in his mind, but he had no idea how long he had been knocked out. Nursing his sore jaw, and conscious of a lump on the side of his head, he went down the stairs. No one was in the lobby; so he went outside and when someone stopped beside him he turned to see Jim Martin, the sheriff.

"What ails yore jaw?" asked the sheriff. "Toothache?"

"Teeth, be damned! Some fellers bushed me in my room and beat hell out of me a while ago. Take a look at the side of my head! And look at that jaw! One feller lit a match, so the other one could sock me."

"Would yuh mind tellin' me why?" asked the sheriff.

"I wouldn't—if I knowed exactly. Yuh see," Artemus leaned against a post and spat painfully, "this here Alexander Hamilton Montgomery wanted me to find him a left-handed puncher. So I—"

"Why did he want a left-handed puncher, Smoky?"

"Gawd only knows—I don't. I went out to the Harder ranch with him, and he had a talk with Sally. After that, he only had one idea, and that was to find himself a left-handed cowpuncher. Well, I found one tonight. He's Ed North, from the Rockin' R spread. So I told Montgomery, and he got excited. We looked at North through a window, and Montgomery said I'd done fine. Then he decided to go out and see Sally Harder.

"Well, I went up to my room and they grabbed me in the dark. The darn fools wanted to know what I wanted a left-handed puncher for, but I can't tell 'em, 'cause I don't know. They asked me if Montgomery is a detective, and I said he ain't. They ask me where he is, and—and they've got a gun-barrel in my ribs; so I told 'em. Then they socked me, and that's all I know."

"You didn't recognize any of them, Smoky?"

"No, I don't know who they was."

"A left-handed cowpuncher," muttered the sheriff. "I don't see—wait a minute! You was in the bank when that hold-up took place. Was there a left-handed one among the three men?"

"Don't ask me, Sheriff; I wasn't watchin' real close."

"Ed North. Yeah, I know him. He's about the same size as—"

"Montgomery said somethin' about sizes, too. I don't know what he meant."

"Smoky, I'll bet Montgomery is in for trouble. Get yore horse and meet me here; we've got to go out and see what's goin' on at Harder's ranch."

"*You* go out to Flint Harder's ranch? queried Smoky.

"To hell with him—I'm the sheriff. Get yore horse."

Bill Nichols did not spare the buckboard team going back to the ranch. Everything seemed serene, and no one in sight. But Sally was not in the house. Nichols went to the bunkhouse and routed out Nick Higby and Pete Soboba. They did not know that Montgomery had been there.

"Her horse was in the stable," said Bill Nichols. "I put him in there today."

An examination of the stable showed that both her horse and saddle were missing. Flint Harder was both mad and worried.

"Somethin' is wrong," he declared. "Sally wouldn't go away with that dude."

"Where would they go?" wondered Nick Higby. "If they went away, they went awful quiet. Me and Pete played pitch for about an hour, before we went to bed, but we never heard a sound."

Flint Harder sat down in the main room and swore roundly.

"Just wait until I get my hands on Montgomery," he threatened.

"If they went to town," said Bill Nichols, "why didn't we meet 'em?"

No one could answer that. Nick Higby, standing near the door, lifted his head. He could hear the thudding of hoofs, as two horses neared the house. The rest of them heard it.

"They're comin' back, I'll bet," said Pete.

No one moved. Heavy footsteps came up to the doorway, and Nick Higby said, "'Evenin', Sheriff."

"Sheriff?" snorted Flint Harder. "Why, that—"

"Take it easy, Harder," said Jim Martin, and stepped into the room. Just behind him came Artemus Day. Harder and Martin faced each other.

"Did yuh find Montgomery here?" asked the sheriff.

Grim-faced, Harder shook his head. Nick Higby said, "Are yuh sure he came here, Martin?"

"All I know is what Smoky said. He told Smoky he was comin' here."

"Why did you come out here?" asked Harder huskily.

"Some men beat up Smoky in his room, tryin' to find out where they could locate Montgomery. Why they want him—I dunno. But men don't beat up a man for nothin'. If they wanted Montgomery bad enough to beat up Smoky to find out where Montgomery is—they ain't just wantin' to pass the time of day with him."

"I'd hate to think so," said Artemus dryly.

"Where's Sally?" asked the sheriff.

"She's gone," replied Harder. "Don't ask me any more—I don't know."

"Gone? Both of 'em gone? Harder, this is serious."

"All right—it's serious!" snapped Harder. "Have yore own way about it. Go on back to town! Git off this place! Damn it, if I need a sheriff, I'll send for one. The rest of yuh get out. Go to Antelope Flats—anywhere. See if yuh can find her. Yo're wastin' time—gawpin' at me."

"F'r once in yore life, you've got somethin' to cuss about—somethin' real," said Artemus. "It must be a relief—after all the cussin' you've wasted on other things."

ANTELOPE FLATS was thoroughly aroused over the report that Sally Harder and "that damn dude," as he was called, had disappeared. Jim Martin, the sheriff, had more posse-volunteers than he could handle. In fact, he didn't know where to start. There was no clue as to where they had gone. Flint Harder came in early, cursed everybody in a weak voice, and sat in his buckboard.

Mrs. Long and Mrs. Dean Harder came to town to see Danny. They walked past the buckboard, but did not look at Flint Harder, who tried not to seem to notice them.

Manana Higgins, who had no fear of Flint Harder's barking, went over and leaned against the buckboard.

"When is that damn fool sheriff goin' to do somethin'?" asked Flint Harder.

"What?" asked Manana wearily. "We sat up all night, tryin' to figure out what to do."

"So did I," replied Harder wearily. "Where's that damn Hartley and his grinnin' pardner, anyway? Why don't they show up?"

Manana shrugged his shoulders. "They're gone, that's all I know."

"Pulled out for good?"

"If they have, we're short two good rifles. Flint, yuh don't reckon Sally eloped with the dude, do yuh?"

Flint Harder almost strangled in his wrath.

"I didn't think they did," said Manana calmly. "I heard folks talk about it."

"Folks are sayin' *that?"* queried Harder huskily.

"I didn't think you was that bad," said Manana. "I happen to know you sent Nell two hundred dollars in the mail."

Flint Harder looked sharply at Manana, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"Aw, don't bluff about it, Flint. You sent Nell two hundred dollars in the mail the other day. She don't know who sent it, but I reckon she has an idea. And she can sure use it, too. I thought at first it was Jim Martin, but he said he didn't."

"Oh, yeah," said Flint Harder absently. "She didn't know."

"Maybe she guessed. Well, I've got to be staggerin' along, Flint."

For a long time Flint Harder sat there, staring at the rumps of the two horses. Artemus Day came along. His big hat fitted better, with the lump on his head, and one side of his chin was purple. Flint Harder looked at Artemus.

"Come over here," he said. Artemus stopped and looked at him.

"Can yuh write?" asked Harder.

"Can I write? Huh! Yore dang right I can—a little. Why?"

"Would yuh do somethin' for me—and then forget it?"

"Anythin' I'd do for you—I'd want to forget, Flint."

"All right. Go over to the post-office, get an envelope, and address it to Mrs. Dean Harder. Put a stamp on it and bring it to me. Here's two-bits."

"Well, I'll be a dry-nurse to a dinny-sour! Oh, sure, I'll do it."

"And forget it, Smoky?"

"I may not forget it, but I shore won't peddle it around."

It was quite a task for Artemus to address the envelope. There were ink-spots and erasures, but he got it all on the envelope, which he took back to Flint Harder.

"I'll remember this, Smoky," said Flint Harder. "Much obliged."

Artemus was so shocked at being thanked by Flint Harder that he merely nodded and walked away.

Mrs. Long had been in the jail, talking with Danny. The sheriff left them alone in there, and was sitting at his desk, when she came out.

"I'm so worried about Sally," she said. Jim Martin nodded.

"I tried to get Nell to come here with me," she said quietly.

Jim Martin turned his head and looked out the window.

"She don't feel that you want to see her," continued Mrs. Long.

"I know," he said slowly. "Nell's proud. I reckon I was wrong, sayin' what I did, when her and Dean got married. If she don't want to come, I guess she is justified. I don't deserve to see her."

"Where are Mr. Hartley and Mr. Stevens?" she asked.

"They went away last night," he replied. "I don't know where they went. Everybody seems to want them."

"Mr. Hartley makes you feel that everything is all right."

"I wish he could make me feel that way."

Mrs. Long left the office and met Artemus at the doorway.

"Howdy, Mrs. Long," he grinned. "How's Danny?"

"Just fine, Smoky."

"He's better off than the rest of us then."

"How is your head this morning?"

"I'm jist scared to death that it's goin' to be all right—thank yuh."

Jim Martin looked up as Artemus came in.

"I hope yuh find my boss," he said. "I'd hate to go back punchin' cows at forty a month—after what I've had."

"Smoky, just *what* do you know about him?"

"Aw, he's just what he says he is, Jim. He's read letters to me from his father, and the old man sure gives him hell—and sends money. His old man has got plenty money, too. Owns a couple banks and a few railroads. Maybe he did have an idea of bein' a detective, 'cause he sent his old man a telegram, sayin' he believed he'd turn detective. The old man wired back, 'You've got to do somethin' besides turn.' "

"Smoky," said the sheriff thoughtfully, "can you write?"

"Can I—well, yeah, I can—some."

"Good enough to write an address on an envelope?"

Artemus looked at him thoughtfully and a bit puzzled.

"I have done such a thing," he said quietly.

The sheriff took an envelope from a desk drawer, shoved it over to Artemus and gave him a pen.

"This," he said quietly, "is just between me and you, Smoky. Write on there, Mrs. Dean Harder, Antelope Flats, Arizona."

With his tongue in his cheek, Artemus hunched over the desk and laboriously scrawled the address—not good, but legible. Jim Martin looked at its closely, thanked Artemus and put the envelope in his desk.

"Much obliged, Smoky," he said. "Don't ever mention it."

"Yo're welcome," said Artemus.

He went outside and walked up the street, still puzzled. Nick Higby and Pete Soboba were talking with Flint Harder at the buckboard. Higby said:

"I don't care what the sheriff does; me and Pete are goin' to put on a search. We're takin' some grub and water along, because we might be gone for a while."

"All right," said Flint Harder wearily, "and thank yuh, Nick."

The two men went to get their horses. Artemus leaned against a porch post and rubbed his jaw. Higby and Soboba starting out on a personal hunt, and might be gone for a while. Where would they be going, wondered Artemus. Why start out, without a definite destination? Or did they have one?

Artemus went back to the stable and saddled his horse.

## VIII

IT WAS just after dark, when Hashknife and Sleepy left Antelope Flats and they rode all night, traveling east across the hills. There was a full moon, which made for good traveling. Early in the morning they stopped to rest the horses and eat a bite of food. They were a long ways away from Antelope Flats. There were no fences, no ranches in those hills, and they saw no cattle. There were plenty deer.

Always they held to an easterly direction, not hurrying, avoiding hard climbs. At times Hashknife led the way to the north or south, cross-cutting the range, looking for a possible cattle-trail, but always they swung back to the east.

It was nearly sundown, as they came out on a ridge and saw a group of weather-beaten ranchhouses in a clump of cottonwoods on the flat below them. An old wooden windmill creaked in the vagrant breeze, and a few head of cattle and horses loafed along the fences.

"That," said Hashknife wearily, "must be the Circle JR, belongin' to Jack Rett, whoever he is. I hope they won't mind feedin' us and givin' us a bed for the night."

"Mind?" grunted Sleepy. "Let 'em try it. When I get this hungry, I'll eat—and I won't even ask permission. C'mon; there's smoke comin' from the stove-pipe."

They rode down past the old corrals and stopped near the kitchen doorway. Someone in the kitchen was singing in a cracked, off-key voice:

"Oh, bury me-e-e not on the lo-o-one pra-a-ree-ee—"

"That all depends on how yuh can cook," said Sleepy.

The man came to the door and shaded his eyes with his hand. He was grizzled and unkempt.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded, as Hashknife came up to the doorway.

"I'm the man you didn't know," replied Hashknife. "How's chances for somethin' to eat?"

He looked searchingly at Hashknife and then at Sleepy.

"All right, I guess," he said. "Where yuh from?"

"Can't we leave that until after we eat?" asked Sleepy. "It'll take a long time in the tellin'."

"Drifters, eh? Well, you shore drifted into a hell of a country."

"Don't yuh like it?" asked Sleepy.

"I ain't been here long enough to know."

"A newcomer, eh?"

"Yeah—ten years." The cook spat disgustedly. "Damn place ain't fit to git drunk in. If yuh feel dudish, there's the wash-basin, and yuh can git water at the windmill. Mostly, we don't bother."

"What spread is this?" asked Hashknife.

"Circle JR."

"Boys are all out, eh?"

"Uh-huh. My name's Panamint, so called because I ain't never been in the Panamints. Born in Kansas, raised in Oklahomy, got chased to New Mexico, and came here of my own accord."

"Can yuh cook?" asked Sleepy.

"That," said Panamint, "has been argued over for ten years. Put yore horses in the stable and give 'em some hay. I'll rustle up a little grub for yuh."

Hashknife and Sleepy did justice to a meal of roast beef, baked beans and boiled potatoes. They solved the question as to whether Panamint was a good cook or not. He wasn't. But hunger was appeased and their belts tightened. Panamint told them that the crew of the Circle JR consisted of five men, plus Jack Rett, who owned the spread.

Panamint was a little vague on the number of cattle, and whether Rett was making any money. He seemed a little suspicious and inclined to evade any direct questions. He did want to know who they were and what they were doing there, but they were as evasive as he.

The old ranchhouse was of two stories, and Panamint showed them a room upstairs, where they might sleep. It only contained a bed and some few blankets, but it was sufficient. There was one window, which Hashknife managed to open, so they could have some fresh air.

"What do yuh think of the place?" asked Sleepy quietly, as they got ready for bed.

Hashknife shook his head. "I'm leary of it, Sleepy. Panamint didn't want us here, but he couldn't get out of it. Better sleep with yore boots on, 'cause yuh never can tell."

It was about midnight, when Hashknife quietly awoke Sleepy.

"I think the boys are back," he whispered.

They both got out of bed, and Hashknife opened the door a few inches. They could hear footsteps and voices down in the main room, and a lamp had been lighted. Someone was yelling for Panamint.

Panamint evidently joined them, because they were clamoring for something to eat. Panamint must have told them about the strangers in the house, because there was absolute silence for a few moments. Then a man asked in a quiet voice:

"Didn't they tell yuh who they are, Panamint?"

Panamint's reply was inaudible. Another voice said:

"A tall one and a shorter one, eh? Where'd they come from?"

"I dunno. Just a couple drifters, I reckon."

"You reckon! Drifters don't come this way. Must be from Lost Horse Valley. Damn it, Panamint, you—"

"Wait a minute, Jack," said another

voice. "Yuh don't suppose—" and the rest was inaudible. The men seemed to move around uneasily. Finally a voice said:

"If it is, what in hell are they doin' over here? If Les was here, he'd know."

"Wait a minute," said a voice with authority. "If it's who we think it is, we'll take care of 'em. Listen here—" The voice was lowered.

"We'll have Panamint call 'em down here—" and the voice faded.

Hashknife carefully closed the door and led the way over to the open window.

"Not wishin' to kill anybody," he whispered, "we'll move out."

Even hanging at full length, it was quite a drop, but they landed safely, and hurried down to the stable, where they saddled and took their horses outside. They could see a light in the window of the room they had vacated, and someone was leaning out of the window.

They rode a short distance away and drew up. They could hear footsteps pounding across the yard and down to the stable. The door banged open and in a few moments a man yelled, "Their horses are gone!"

Someone up at the house was swearing at somebody else for talking too loudly. Panamint said, "So that was Hashknife Hartley, eh? Wish I'd have known it when they came."

"Bad, bad boys," remarked Hashknife. "Well, anyway we're not hungry."

"What's to be done?" asked Sleepy.

"There's a hill over there," replied Hashknife, pointing in the darkness. "We'll hive up over there and see what they do in the mornin'."

"Damn Bob Marsh!" groaned Sleepy.

## IX

THERE was little of the dude about Alexander Hamilton Montgomery. He war dirty of face, his hair matted, his gaudy clothes torn and soiled, and he had no glasses. There was a red welt running from above his left eyebrow nearly to the crown of his head, and it had bled enough to mat his hair. The left eye was slightly discolored. And in addition to all this, Alexander Hamilton Montgomery was securely bound, hand and foot, and lying on the hard floor of an old shack.

Near him, also bound, but sitting on an old blanket, was Sally Harder. Sally was uninjured, but her face was dirty, and she was not a bit happy. A grizzled old rawhider, dirty and unkempt, was mixing biscuits in the top of a flour-sack. He wore an old, patched shirt, misfit overalls, which were held up by a piece of rope, in lieu of suspenders, and he wore an old pair of boots, from which the heels had been knocked off. Belted around his expansive waist was a very serviceable-looking belt and a holstered Colt.

"Are you awake, Monty?" asked Sally wearily.

"Yes," replied Monty weakly. "What happened?"

The old man chuckled. "I told yuh he'd wake up after while. I've knowed feliers to sleep the clock around, after a belt over the head."

"What happened?" repeated Alexander Hamilton Montgomery.

"Don't you remember the fight at the stable?" asked Sally.

"Yes, I—why, certainly—I remember."

"That was last night."

"Oh! Last night? What is it now?"

"It's past noon next day. How does your head feel?"

"It simply doesn't, Sally. But—where are we?"

"Are yuh good at guessin'?" asked the old cook.

"I suppose I am."

"All right—guess."

"Do you mean I have been asleep since last night?"

"Naw," replied the old cook. "You woke up seven, eight times, crazy as a loon. Me and the girl was worried about yuh."

"But why are we tied up? We haven't done anything."

The old man cackled and slapped his knee.

"Is that funny to you?" asked Sally.

"It shore is. Innercent as a lamb, ain't he?"

"Who are you?" asked Montgomery.

"Me? The boys call me Sody. And I'm boss here, and dontcha forget it. I'd as soon slit yore neck as look at yuh."

"A very pleasant thought," sighed Montgomery.

Sody poked some wood into the little, sheet-iron stove, dusted his hands off on his overalls and sat down on a box to fill his pipe.

"So yo're a detective, eh?" he sneered.

"Am I?" queried Montgomery.

"Yeah. And yore old man is rich."

"What does that have to do with it?"

"We kill two birds with one stone. You get what's comin' to you, after we git a hunk of the old man's money. Good idea, eh?"

"Whose idea was that?" asked Sally.

"I can't tell yuh that, my dear."

"But why keep me here? My father isn't rich—and I'm not a detective."

Sody took his pipe from his mouth, spat against the side of the stove and shook his head.

"All I know is the boss said you was gettin' too damn smart. It's his business—not mine. All I'm supposed to do is to see that both of yuh are kept here safe. There won't nobody find yuh here; so yuh may as well behave. Just remember—I'm boss here."

"Do you know Hashknife Hartley?" queried Montgomery. Sody got to his feet and came over near the young man.

"What about Hashknife Hartley?" he asked.

"Nothing—I just wondered."

"Where did you know him?" asked Sody.

"At Antelope Flats."

"At Antelope Flats? When?"

"I—I saw him yesterday."

"Yo're lyin'. He ain't in this country."

"Do you know Les Hart?" asked Sally.

"Of course, I know him. What about Les Hart?"

"Hashknife Hartley killed him the other day."

Sody turned, walked to the door and opened it. After looking around, he closed the door and came back.

"Where's Hartley now—in Antelope Flats?" he asked.

"He and Sleepy Stevens left Antelope Flats yesterday," said Montgomery. "They borrowed rifles from the sheriff."

"Where was they goin'?" demanded Sody anxiously.

"No one knows," replied Montgomery. "Hartley never tells what he is going to do."

"So he killed Les Hart, eh? I think yo're lyin'."

"I was along," said Montgomery. "Les Hart and two other men shot at us, but the other two got away, when the sheriff came along."

Sody swore under his breath, secured an old, battered washpan, and quickly drew the fire from the little stove. He took the pan outside, doused the fire with water, and came back in.

"What was the idea of doing that?" asked Montgomery.

"Do you think I'm throwin' up smoke signals?" he snarled. "From now on, we cook at night—if we cook at all."

"Perhaps Hartley has already seen your smoke," suggested Montgomery.

"You two better hope he don't," snarled Sody. "You won't live to tell *him* anythin'."

Sody went outside, fastened the door, and went away. They could hear cattle bawling near the shack.

"We're at somebody's ranch," said Sally.

"My head hurts," complained Montgomery. "All of me, except my head is numb. What do you suppose they'll do with us, Sally?"

"I don't know. You heard what he said about getting money from your father."

"That might take months. Why, they don't even know where he is."

"I don't know what will happen," she sighed. "Sody said that no one would ever find us here. It's a long ways from Antelope Flats, unless they went in a circle. I was blindfolded, and they led my horse. I know we climbed a lot of hills."

"You seem very brave," said Montgomery.

"I—I'm not—I'm frightened to death."

"I'm to blame for all of this," said Montgomery miserably. "It was all because of the left-handed man, I'm sure."

"Then your idea must have been right, Monty."

"That's right. Ed North must have been the left-handed man in the bank robbery."

Sody opened the door and came in. He walked over to Montgomery, an evil grin on his homely face.

"I thought you'd talk if I wasn't here," he said harshly. "That's all I wanted to hear. The boys wasn't sure—but they're sure now."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy spent a rather uncomfortable night in the brush and were awake early, watching the Circle JR ranchhouse. They saw Old Panamint get wood for the stove, and bring in water.

"I'd sure like breakfast," yawned Sleepy. "I crave food."

"Tighten yore belt, pardner; we're a long way from food," said Hashknife.

In about thirty minutes a man left the ranchhouse and went down to the stable, where he saddled a horse. Two others went down and talked with him for a while, after which he mounted and rode away, taking a westerly route, which brought him within about three hundred yards of where Hashknife and Sleepy sat on the brushy hill.

Hashknife smiled, as the rider headed west, unhurried and alone.

"Do we foller him?" asked Sleepy.

"Later — maybe," replied Hashknife. "He looks like a decoy to me."

The other men had gone back to the house. After a half hour of waiting, Hashknife said, "Maybe I'm wrong, Sleepy. They might have—oh-oh!"

The two men left the house and went to the stable. Hashknife grinned, as they led out saddled horses, mounted quickly and headed west. They did not follow the trail of the first man, but went angling out to the southwest, where a wide swale allowed them to swing west and keep out of sight.

Hashknife led the way back to their horses, and they mounted quickly, after tightening their cinches, and started west again, taking advantage of the low places.

"The first man was a decoy, Sleepy," declared Hashknife. "I'll bet he kept bearin' to the north, expectin' us to trail him, and get lost. Those other two whippoorwills are the ones we want to trail."

"Where do yuh reckon they're goin'?" asked Sleepy.

"Stealin' cows."

"Stealin' cows? Yuh mean that the Circle JR are rustlers?"

"I think so, Sleepy; but we've got to prove it."

"And starve to death, while we're doin' it."

## X

IN THE meantime, Artemus Day, "knowed as Smoky," was having a hard time. All day he trailed Nick Higby and Pete Soboba; trailed them far out of Lost Horse Valley, but lost them at nightfall. Artemus was disgusted with himself. He brought no food nor water—and Artemus liked to eat. Here he was, miles from Antelope Flats, his horse weary, and now that he had lost his quarry, all he had for his pains was a cold night and an empty stomach.

"But they was goin' some place," he told

himself. "Them two *pelicanos* wasn't *lookin'*—they was goin'. And if I ain't mistaken, they wasn't far from that place. *Manana,* I take me a look."

Artemus shivered in the cold, gray dawn, as he saddled his horse.

"I wish I could eat grass," he told the animal.

He rode a few miles further, following the direction he believed taken by Nick Higby and Pete Soboba, and came to the rim of a deep canyon. Artemus thought it over and decided that this was El Diablo Canyon, of which he had heard, but had never seen before.

"I'm shore a long ways from Antelope Flats," he declared. "Well, they didn't go into that canyon; so we better hunt for a way around it."

It took Artemus a long time to find the head of the canyon, where he was no better off than before. As far as eye could see, there was only the brushy hills. A mile away was a tall hill; so Artemus decided to ride up there and see what he could see from that elevation.

It gave him a fair view of the country, but offered little. Far away he could see the blue haze of Lost Horse Valley, but there were a lot of broken hills before he could reach the valley. But it was nice up there, sitting on a flat rock in the shade; so Artemus dozed, wondering just what he was going to do for something to eat, and also wondering what had become of Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Sally Harder.

But after an hour or two of deep contemplation, he decided that life was little, without nourishment. As he turned to go back to his horse, he saw a lone horseman. The rider was a quarter of a mile away, on the crest of another hill, apparently looking over the country. Nick Higby rode a sorrel, Pete Soboba rode a black; so this was neither of them, because this man rode a gray.

"Prob'ly another hungry pilgrim," decided Artemus. "I'll cut his trail."

It was not difficult for Artemus to locate the man. He was a big, unkempt denizen of the range, and he looked with evident disfavor upon Artemus. As a matter of fact, Artemus didn't like the man's looks one bit. Artemus did not wear a holstered gun, but shoved it inside the waist-band of his overalls, and as he eased himself in the saddle, the gun slid down. In the event of trouble, Artemus would almost have to undress himself in order to get that gun.

"Just who the hell are you, anyway?" said the stranger.

"The name's Day," replied Artemus.

"Day, huh? What'r yuh doin' up here?"

Artemus bristled. After all, who was this dirty-looking person to question Artemus Day? If that darn gun hadn't slipped—

"Where'd yuh come from?" demanded the man harshly.

"Antelope Flats."

"Oh, yo're from Antelope Flats, eh? Wish yuh was back there?"

"Yeah, I kinda do," admitted Artemus.

"It's a long walk," said the man slowly, "so yuh might as well start."

"Walk? Why, you—"

A heavy Colt appeared in the man's hand, and the muzzle of it was pointed straight at Artemus Day.

"Get off," the man ordered. Artemus got off slowly, and that gun slid down to his knee.

"Toss me that tie-rope."

Reluctantly Artemus tossed him the end of the rope, which the man looped around his saddle-horn.

"I ort to drill yuh," growled the man. "Yeah, I ort to do that."

Artemus held his breath. The man looked capable of doing just that.

"Na-a-aw, I don't want to play a joke on the buzzards," he said.

Slowly he relaxed and holstered his gun.

"I'll jist take yore horse, and let yuh walk back to Antelope Flats. Next time I meet yuh, I'll shoot yore liver loose."

Then he swung his horse around and rode away, leading Artemus' horse. Had he looked back he would have seen Artemus yank the left leg of his overalls from his boot-top, shake his leg violently and grab a Colt .45 before it hit the dirt.

The man was about a hundred feet away, both horses trotting, when Artemus leveled that big gun and squeezed the trigger. Artemus' horse swung out of line, as that heavy bullet went over its head, but the man didn't even turn his head. His body twisted a little and he seemed to lean a little more forward. Then they disappeared in the brush.

"Missed him!" groaned Artemus. "Dog my cats, I missed him! My gosh, he never even looked back. Mebbe he's deef. Or did I miss him? He never even looked back! I jist wonder—"

Artemus went bow-legging his way down through the brush, gun in hand.

"I ain't goin' to walk, until I have to!" he panted. "Play a joke on the buzzards! I'll learn him."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy had had about the same luck as Artemus. For a while they had been able to trail the two men, but in trying to not be seen themselves, they lost the track. It was a big country, with plenty of brush, and the ground was far too hard to leave hoofprints. After searching for an hour or more, Hashknife and Sleepy headed west, intending to go back to Antelope Flats, when they heard the rattling report of a shot.

They drew up and listened. The shot was not far away, but it was difficult to tell just in what direction, because of the multiple echoes.

"Mebbe somebody took a shot at a deer," suggested Sleepy.

"Might be," nodded Hashknife, "but I figure that anybody in these hills might also take a shot at us, if they had a good chance."

They moved on a short distance, when Hashknife jerked his horse up short. Down through a brushy swale, only a short distance away, came a rider, leading a saddled horse. The rider was acting queerly. He seemed to be leaning forward, as though searching the ground ahead of him. The man and the two horses came into a clearing, just as the rider collapsed, falling forward across the horse's shoulder, where he slid to the ground, as the frightened horse swung away from him. Both horses stopped against the brush, looking at the fallen rider.

Hashknife and Sleepy moved forward quickly, and had just reached the man, when a disheveled figure crashed down through the brush. It was Artemus, swinging the big gun in his hand. He stopped short, his eyes wide in astonishment.

"I'll be a nurse to a dinny-sour!" he yelped. "You fellers!"

"Artemus Day!" exclaimed Hashknife. "What on earth—"

"He—he stuck me up and took my horse —so I popped him!"

"And so you popped him," said Hashknife. "I'll be darned!"

"He had it comin'," declared Artemus. "Stealin' my horse and makin' me walk back to Antelope Flats. Said he had a notion to shoot out my liver."

"Lookin' at the gent," remarked Sleepy, "I believe yuh, Artemus."

Hashknife looked up from his examination of the man.

"Recognize the gray horse, Sleepy?" he asked. "That's the decoy."

"That's right. Artemus, how come he didn't take yore gun?"

"He never seen it. The darn thing slipped down m' pants-leg, and I had to wait until he pulled out, before I could shake it loose."

Hashknife squatted on his heels and rolled a cigarette, as he considered the dead man.

"Artemus, what are you doin' up here—alone?" he said finally.

"My gosh, that's right—you don't know the news. There's been a lot of happen-

stances since you two left Antelope Flats. Listen—"

And Artemus told them the whole story about the left-handed cowboy, his experience in the hotel room, the missing Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Sally Harder. He told them of how he followed Nick Higby and Pete Soboda all the way from Antelope Flats, only to lose them near El Diablo Canyon.

"I heard Nick Higby tell Flint Harder that him and Pete was goin' to search the country," declared Artemus. "Then I got my horse and trailed 'em, but they never searched a damn bit, Hashknife."

"Why did yuh trail them, Artemus?" asked Hashknife.

"Well, I—I didn't have nothin' else to do—and I wanted to do somethin'. After all, I've lost my bank-roll. No dude, no salary."

"He's a mercenary little devil," remarked Sleepy. "Artemus, yuh don't happen to have some ham and aigs in yore pocket, do yuh?"

"Why speak of love?" asked Artemus.

HASHKNIFE ground the light off his cigarette, and proceeded to search the dead man's pockets. In a hip-pocket of his overalls was a flat package, wrapped in paper. Inside was nine hundred and sixty dollars in currency. There was also a slip of paper, on which was penciled:

96 X 20—1920. One Half—960.

Hashknife studied the piece of paper closely, folded it up with the money and put it in his pocket.

"I suppose yuh have to sell 'em cheap, when yuh steal 'em," he said.

"What was that?" asked Sleepy.

"Just talkin' out loud," smiled Hashknife. "Well, I reckon we've got to pack this hombre down to the sheriff."

"I s'pose," sighed Artemus.

They caught the two horses, and roped the dead man to his own saddle.

"Cinch him on good," grunted Sleepy, tugging on a rope. "We're goin' fast, 'cause I'm hungry, and it's a long ways to ham and aigs."

They rode out of the swale, with Hashknife in the lead, and with Artemus, leading the extra horse, bringing up the rear. They were just going over the top of the swale, when a bullet smashed into the fork of Artemus' saddle, and the report of the rifle rattled across the hills. Another sighed past Sleepy's head, and he ducked low. Artemus let loose of the lead-rope, which uncoiled from the saddle-horn, as he spurred ahead.

"I ain't botherin' with no dead men!" yelped Artemus, and went galloping down the other side, his horse buck-jumping the brush.

More rifle bullets seeped through the brush, but all three riders were over the top of the swale. Hashknife and Sleepy dismounted quickly, yanked their rifles from their saddles, and crouched in the brush. Artemus crossed the swale and was on the opposite rim; when his big, expensive Stetson hat went sailing. Artemus lost no time in dismounting.

Hashknife and Sleepy could hear Artemus swearing over his mutilated hat. They could not see anyone, but they knew that no one would dare come over that rim. The brush was too heavy to move in without being heard.

"Can yuh see anybody, Artemus?" called Sleepy, and a faint voice replied:

"I'm down so damn flat I couldn't even see my own face in a mirror."

There was a period of silence, and then Artemus began yelling, "There they go! There they go! The sons-of-guns stole m' dead man!"

And Artemus emptied his six-shooter in their direction, swearing after every shot.

"Run, you grave-robbers!" he shrilled.

Hashknife and Sleepy stood up and walked back to their horses. "Which way did they go?" asked Sleepy.

"Straight east—and goin' like hell," replied Artemus. "They must have sneaked in and caught that four-legged hearse,

'cause they was way out there, when I saw 'em. Look at that hat, will yuh? Top busted right out of it!"

"Good thing it didn't fit," said Sleepy dryly.

"Yeah, that's right. I'd look funny with my head fuzzed up thataway."

"Did you see what color horses they was ridin'?" asked Hashknife.

"A sorrel and a pinto."

"All three from the Circle JR," said Hashknife. "I'll bet they were to meet that decoy person right here, and see what he knew."

"And he ain't talkin'," added Artemus. "He-ey! You say they're from the Circle JR?"

"That's right," nodded Hashknife.

"Whee-e-e, brother!" snorted Artemus. "I thought I'd seen that mug before. The gent I ventilated was Jack Rett, the owner of the Circle JR."

"Are yuh sure of that?" asked Hashknife.

"Yo're darn right! I never seen him but once in my life, but yuh can't mistake a face like that. Brother, when I shoot—I take the top man."

"Well, anyway," said Sleepy, "they took the job off our hands. We might have a hard job explainin' things to the sheriff. This way, it's their problem, not ours. If there's any argument, we'll swear that you killed him. What yuh should have done was to take his scalp."

"He darn near took mine," said Artemus.

Hashknife rolled and lighted another cigarette, his eyes thoughtful.

"You spoke about El Diablo Canyon, Artemus," he said quietly.

"Uh-huh. It's over thataway, two, three miles, I think."

"Big canyon?"

"Plenty. Must be seven, eight miles long, and if yuh fell into it yore whiskers would grow three inches, before yuh hit bottom."

"I'd like to see it."

Sleepy groaned. "Anythin' to keep me away from the feed-bag."

"We'll take a look at El Diablo Canyon," said Hashknife.

## XI

THINGS were not so pleasant for Sheriff Jim Martin. Harassed by Flint Harder, the prosecuting attorney, and most everybody in Antelope Flats, he sat in his office, mad enough to resign. There had been no move made by the kidnapers, no communication of any kind; and there was nothing to indicate where Sally Harder and Alexander Hamilton Montgomery might be. What was the use, he argued, of a sheriff running around on a fruitless search?

Flint Harder wanted his daughter back, and he wanted her right now. Most of his time was spent on the seat of his buckboard out in front of the hotel, waiting for news. Few went to him, because of his bitter tongue. Nick Higby and Pete Soboba had not returned, and he heard that Artemus "Smoky" Day was also missing. It seemed to him that everybody in Lost Horse Valley was keeping an eye out for a clue, except Jim Martin, the sheriff.

Henry Clews, the elderly postmaster, left the post office and went down to the sheriff's office, hurrying. That was news, because Clews was never known to be in a hurry. He went into the office and leaned across the sheriff's desk.

"Jim," he said, "I've got something!"

From his pocket he removed a soiled envelope and placed it on the sheriff's desk. Printed on it in scrawling capitals, written with a soft lead pencil was the address:

James A. Montgomery, Wall Street, New York City.

"What about it?" asked the sheriff curiously.

"This," replied Clews. "That's the name of the dude's father. I've seen it on his envelopes most every day."

Jim Martin leaned back and considered the envelope closely. It was soiled and

wrinkled, some of the letters smudged. It might have been carried in a chaps-pocket for some distance.

"Under the circumstances I reckon I'll take a chance and open it," he said slowly. "It might tell us somethin'."

Clews nodded. "I hope it does, Jim."

The envelope contained a single sheet of soiled paper, on which had been penciled:

*"We've got your son. If his life is worth* $20,000 *to you, send it to Jim Martin, the sheriff, Antelope Flats, Arizona. If he ain't worth it, don't do anything. We don't mind killing him. We'll tell the sheriff how to give us the money.*

*Yours truly,*
*The Lost Horse Gang.*

Jim Martin read it aloud, while Clews nodded violently.

"I'm glad I spotted it," he said. "Now we know he's been kidnaped."

"And," added the sheriff, "if they don't collect twenty thousand dollars from the dude's father—they'll kill him. But this don't tell us where Sally Harder is, Clews."

The sheriff copied the letter, sealed it up and gave it back to the postmaster.

"You better get that out on the first mail," he said. "I'll send him a telegram right away."

Mrs. Long came to see Danny, and the sheriff went back to the cell with her, where he told them both about the ransom letter.

"Not a word. Anyway, they wasn't askin' the dude's father for money for Sally Harder."

"No, that is true," admitted Mrs. Long.

"How is Nell?" asked the sheriff quietly.

"I'm glad you asked about her," said Mrs. Long. "Maybe you can unravel this mystery. Nell has received three letters, all addressed by the same person. In the first one was two hundred dollars, in the second one was five hundred dollars, and in the last one, one hundred dollars. Eight hundred dollars, and not a scratch to show who sent them."

Jim Martin grunted in amazement. Eight hundred dollars! All sent by the same person. He had sent her a hundred dollars, but he had no idea who had sent the other two amounts. If he could get his hands on Artemus Day—but Artemus was among the missing.

"Are you sure about the writing on the envelopes?" he asked.

"They are identical, Mr. Martin."

Jim Martin shook his head. "It's sure queer," he said quietly.

Manana Higgins met the sheriff in the office, and asked him about the ransom letter.

"Who told you, Manana?" asked the sheriff.

"Flint Harder. Henry Clews told him, and Flint is rearin' straight up in his buckboard, cussin' everybody. Mebbe he thinks he'll get one for Sally. Mebbe he will, at that. Now what's to be done, Jim?"

"I'm wirin' to the dude's father. If he don't hurry, them dirty coyotes might kill the kid. The Lost Horse Gang! Can yuh imagine that?"

"I'm beginnin' to," replied Manana, dryly. "I wish I knew where Hashknife, Sleepy and that damn Smoky Day are. They ain't stayin' away for fun. Sa-ay! I just wonder."

"Wonder what?" asked the sheriff curiously.

"Hashknife was askin' a lot of questions about the Circle JR outfit. Wanted to know about Jack Rett, and what kind of a place he had. He looked through the brand register, and I seen him foolin' with a pencil, drawin' brands. Jim, do you reckon they went over to the Circle JR?"

"I don't know. I hope they come back and return my rifles."

"You know Jack Rett, don't yuh, Jim?"

"Yeah, I know him—the homely devil. I wouldn't trust him from here to you."

"That's it, Jim. Could Hartley be figurin' that mebbe Rett and his outfit—"

"They ain't even in Lost Horse Valley."

"Oh, yuh mean the name of their gang. That don't mean nothin'. 'Member New York Jones? Never was out of Colorado in his life."

"Manana," said Jim Martin soberly, "you seem to have hatched an idea. It'll give us a reason for leavin' Antelope Flats. I'm sick of seein' that scorpion of a Harder, settin' there in his buckboard."

"Yuh mean—headin' east, Jim?"

"Uh-huh. Rustle us enough grub for a couple days. Have Alphabet Anderson look after the prisoner. Don't tell anybody where we're goin'—and they might think we've got a clue."

"Ain't we, Jim?"

"We ain't—all we've got is a destination."

XII

THE plight of Sally and Alexander Hamilton Montgomery had not improved with time. It was bad enough to be bound hand and foot for many hours, but Sody refused to build a fire and do any cooking during the day, for fear of someone seeing the smoke. Once during the night, Sody went out and talked with some men, far enough away to prevent Sally and Montgomery from hearing what was said. Sody had a bottle of liquor when he came in, and seemed in better spirits.

"What are they waiting for?" groaned Montgomery. "If they are going to kill me, why wait?"

"Are yuh in a hurry to die?" asked Sody. "If yuh are, I've got a real sharp knife. It won't hurt yuh much."

Montgomery subsided. Sally was very brave, but very weary. It seemed weeks since they came to that shack. They hated to even ask Sody for a drink of water.

It was late in the afternoon, when Sody heard the sound of hoofs on the ground. He took his gun in hand and went quietly outside.

"Someone coming," said Sally. "Listen, Monty."

Sody said, "Jack Rett—dead? My Gawd, what happened to him?"

They were unable to hear the reply, but one man said, "Damn 'em, we had 'em dead to rights at the ranch, but somebody talked too loud, and they got away."

After some low-toned conversation, which they could not hear, one of the men said:

"No, he didn't. Jack went out ahead, tryin' to draw 'em away, in case they were watchin' the ranch. They followed him."

"But who's the third man?" asked Sody. "Yuh say there was three?"

"That's right. They were takin' Jack away with 'em, but we made one of 'em drop the lead rope. I don't know how we missed killin' some of 'em."

"Are yuh sure it was Hartley?" asked Sody.

"Mighty sure."

"And they're around here yet, eh?"

"We don't know—but we're not takin' any chances."

"The hell you ain't!" snorted Sody. "Comin' down here thataway. That Hartley could trail a snake across a lake. Chances!"

"Gettin' spooky, eh, Sody?"

"You bet I'm gettin' spooky! Me here alone with them two. Suppose I'm bushed, with them both here in my care? Who swings for it? Me! Don't tell me anythin' different. If I had my way, I'd kill 'em both—and be done with it."

There was a period of low conversation, and Sody said:

"That letter has been posted. I think it's a loco idea. Suppose it does reach the man? It'll be weeks before it can be worked out. By that time everybody in Lost Horse Valley will be searchin'. And if Hartley suspects yore outfit, all hell can't save us. Damn it, they've already got Les Hart and Jack Rett. Don't tell me anythin' about it—I know plenty."

The conversation quieted. Sally whispered, "Monty, it's the Circle JR outfit. Jack Rett was the owner. Les Hart was

one of their gang. Monty, don't you hear me?"

In the gloom of the shack she could see Monty's right shoulder twisting, and he seemed to be breathing heavily. Then he sagged back.

"Sally!" he whispered huskily. "Listen, Sally!"

"What is wrong?" she asked.

"I've got my right arm free!" he whispered.

"Sh-h-h-h!" she breathed. Horses were moving away, and in a few moments Sody came back and closed the door.

He picked up his bottle and took a big drink.

"Everythin' is all right," he told them. "In a few days the dude's father will be sendin' the money, and we'll let yuh go."

"Both of us?" asked Sally.

Sody chuckled. "I ain't so sure of you, my dear."

"You don't know where my father lives," said Montgomery.

"No? Well, smart feller, we happened to get one of the envelopes yuh throwed away, which gives yore father's address. The letter has gone to him; so yuh might as well take it easy. We'll get the money."

Sody drank again with satisfaction, and stretched out on his bunk, but he was constantly alert. Any slight sound would send him to the doorway, where he would listen intently. It was nearly dark in the shack, when Montgomery asked Sody for a drink.

Sody growled a curse, but got up and filled a cup.

"If you will please help me to sit up, we will not spill so much," said Montgomery. "It is difficult to drink in a reclining position."

"Yuh talk like a dictionary, Dude," growled Sody. "All right, I'll set yuh up."

He leaned over Montgomery, clutched him by the shoulders and began lifting. As Montgomery came to a sitting position, he twisted a little and his right fist, in a short, jolting uppercut, caught Sody just too high for a knockout. However, it knocked him down on the floor, where he sprawled, clawing around, trying to get up again. Montgomery's feet were bound, and his left hand, only partly loose, was of no use to him, but he twisted and rolled into Sody, trying to hit him again with his right fist.

But Sody was an old campaigner in rough-and-tumble fighting. He was still dazed, but full of fight. He hit Montgomery on the side of the head, and tried to follow it up with a left-hand punch, but missed and fell across Montgomery. By that time Montgomery had his left hand loose, but it was so cramped that it was of little value. However, he wrapped his left arm around Sody's neck, and punched him several times with short right jabs. They were fighting silently in the half-light, like a couple of animals. Sody's left eye was fast swelling shut, and Montgomery was bleeding from the nose.

Suddenly Sody tore himself loose, leaving part of his shirt in Montgomery's hand. He staggered to his feet, snarling like a wolf, as he fairly tore his gun from his holster. He was almost standing on Sally, as he drew the gun, but before he could level it, the girl drew back her two bound feet and kicked ahead with all the strength in her body.

Her hard heels caught Sody's left kneecap, knocking him off balance, and the gun went off, pointed ceilingward. She kicked again, and Sody came down, hitting the side of his head against the rough wall. This time he didn't get up.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Montgomery. "You did it, Sally!"

"Never mind that," panted Sally. "Get a knife and cut us loose."

"Yes, of course. Stupid of me, I'm sure."

Montgomery crawled over to the table, where he secured the butcher-knife, sawed the ropes off his ankles, and then released Sally, who cried out from the pain of returning circulation.

Montgomery mopped the blood off his face, picked up Sody's gun, and looked around, wondering what to do next.

"Find rope—tie Sody—" panted Sally painfully.

There was plenty of rope in the shack, but Montgomery knew little about knots. However, he was willing, and in a few minutes Sody was trussed from end to end, blinking up at them. Sally lighted a lantern and they looked at Sody, who glared at them with his one good eye.

"Done in by a damn dude!" he wailed. "I knowed I should have killed yuh both when I had the chance."

"Just where is this shack?" asked Sally.

"In the deepest part of El Diablo Canyon, sister."

"But—they say—" faltered Sally.

"That there ain't no way in," chuckled Sody. "Well, there is, sister; wide enough to drive cows—if yuh can find it. Go ahead, I'll give yuh plenty time."

"What is El Diablo Canyon?" asked Montgomery.

"Show him, sister. Show him El Diablo Canyon, where no man can go. They won't even find yore bones in here, Dude. Better take it easy, traveling in the dark. There's bottomless pot-holes—remember."

They went outside. The little shack was hemmed in with brush and piles of huge boulders, probably invisible, except from straight overhead. Overhead was a strip of starlit sky, but all else was black. Somewhere a cow bawled softly.

"They must have cattle down in here, Monty," said Sally.

"Why not?" queried Montgomery.

"Of course, you wouldn't understand," she said.

"All I care to understand is that I want to get you out of here and back home safely, Sally," he said. "I'm not much good in a place like this. Not much good any place, as far as that goes. But no matter what happens to us, I want you to know that I think you are the most wonderful girl I have ever met."

"Thank you, Monty."

"You saved my life, when you kicked him on the knee. In another moment, he would have fired. You are wonderful, Sally."

"As a life-saver?" she asked.

"As a woman, Sally. If we ever get out of this place alive—"

"Let's do that first," she suggested. "The rest can wait."

"You have very sensible ideas. By the way, I still have Sody's gun."

"Be careful of it, Monty. You take the lantern and lead the way. Maybe we can find our way out of here."

## XIII

HASHKNIFE sat on the rim of the canyon, while Sleepy and Artemus sprawled on their backs, comparing things they like to eat. The sides of El Diablo were very brushy, in spite of their sheer cliffs, and it was difficult to get any view of the bottom. From down in the canyon came the sound of a muffled shot. At least, it sounded like a shot.

A buzzard came flapping its way up along the cliffs, turning and twisting, as it gained altitude. Hashknife considered the buzzard, and nodded with satisfaction.

"That was a shot," he told them. "It scared that buzzard. There wasn't much echo; so the shot must have been fired inside a cave, inside a house, or with the muzzle close to an object."

"I sure hope it wasn't against Alexander Hamilton Montgomery," said Artemus soberly. "I'd hate to go back to forty a month again."

"And it's forty miles to ham and eggs," sighed Sleepy.

"Artemus," said Hashknife, "did you say that there's no way into El Diablo?"

"Never has been, as far as I know."

"No outlet at the other end?"

"Nope. Both ends just alike, alle same angle-worm."

"There's somebody down in there. That shot came from there."

"Yeah, it sure sounded thataway. But you'll find that somebody learned a buzzard

how to shoot. It's a funny world. Yuh didn't know that I was a professional envelope director, did yuh?"

"I suppose there's a funny answer," sighed Sleepy.

"There ain't. Yuh see—"

"Wait a minute!" snorted Hashknife. He got quickly to his feet, peering into the canyon.

"What did yuh see?" asked Sleepy anxiously.

"I saw a cow."

"In that canyon?" jeered Artemus. "Man, it must be hunger—not cows."

"Mebbe a shadow," suggested Sleepy. "Pardner, it's almost sundown. If we are goin' to get back to Antelope Flats before—"

Hashknife hitched up his belt and looked around.

"You fellows can go back to Antelope Flats, if yuh want to, but I'm goin' to find a way into that canyon."

"Right over there is a slippery rock, pointin' down," said Artemus. "If yuh must do it—there's the place."

"Make up yore minds," said Hashknife quietly. "There's food in Antelope Flats —none here."

"If you can stand it, pardner—I can," said Sleepy.

"And I can forget mine," said Artemus, but added—"I hope."

They rode for about a mile, but it was getting too dark. Sleepy suggested that they stay there all night and make their search in daylight.

"I'm playin' a hunch," said Hashknife. "You boys stay here, while I do some scoutin'. If I want yuh, I'll whistle like a mocker. You know the notes, Sleepy."

Then he was gone. Even in high-heel boots Hashknife was as stealthy as a marauding Apache. It required a lot of time for him to cover a hundred yards. He stopped often and listened, feeling with each foot, avoiding broken twigs, his hands gently fending the brush, so it would not scrape across his clothes. Some sixth sense told him that he was, in the parlance of the old parlor game, getting warm. He crouched near the bole of an old gnarled tree, every sense alive.

Just ahead, through a thicket of mesquite, he saw a match lighted. He and Sleepy and Artemus were not the only ones on the rim of El Diablo Canyon that night. Slowly he made his way to the thicket, where he crouched again. Fifty feet ahead of him were two men, conversing in low tones.

Hashknife slid forward on the hard, rocky ground, and began snaking his way through the mesquite. It was slow work. Each branch of mesquite is barbed, and they grow low. He had to unhook every barb, before going ahead. But he had patience. Each slither brought him closer to the two men, and in a matter of fifteen minutes, he was not over a dozen feet away, unseen and unheard. One of the men was on his feet, apparently looking into the canyon, because he said:

"Damn that Sody! He must be drunk—runnin' around with a lighted lantern. Somebody's goin' to see that and—you stay here—I'm goin' down there and cuff the ears off that old fool."

Hashknife could not see the horses, but he heard the creak of leather, as the man mounted, and he saw the blur of horse and rider, as they seemed to actually fall off into the canyon. He heard the slither of gravel from a trail, as the hoofs slid.

The remaining guard at the top of the trail began humming a tune. Hashknife began snaking his way ahead. He was afraid that the man would hear the rasp of his clothes against the rocky ground, but the humming kept on. At a distance of about ten feet Hashknife was low enough to see the silhouette of the man's head and shoulders against the sky. Evidently he was sitting on a rock.

Hashknife inched ahead, lifting on his elbows, almost breathless now. Then the man got to his feet, apparently looking down into the canyon. Then he said aloud,

"Where the hell's he's goin' with that lantern?"

He turned quickly, as though starting over to his horse, when Hashknife grasped his ankles, throwing him flat on the ground. The startled yell from the man's throat was broken by his heavy fall, and the next moment Hashknife was sitting on him. But the man was powerful, and in spite of the weight on his back, got to his hands and knees, wheezing a curse. Then Hashknife's heavy forty-five banged against the side of his head, and he collapsed, with a smothered grunt.

"One baby down, one see-gar," panted Hashknife. He got to his feet and found the man's horse, where he took down the rope and came back.

One of the man's sleeves made an effective gag, and with forty feet of hard-twist rope, the man was securely bound in a few moments.

HASHKNIFE took the man's gun, and went over to the top of the trail, where he sat down, lighted a cigarette and waited for the other man, who came in about fifteen minutes, his horse heaving from the climb. He swung off and dropped his reins.

"That wasn't Sody!" he blurted. "Sody's in the shack, nursin' a sore head—and them two have gone. They took the lantern, and Gawd only knows where they are now. The dude got a hand loose and whipped Sody, and then they tied him up. Hell's to pay, and no pitch hot!"

*Whap!* Hashknife's chop with that gun-barrel was no love-tap. He caught the man in his arms and dragged him over beside his companion, where he used the man's own rope to hog-tie him securely.

Then he stepped away, cupped his hands and whistled the call of the mocking-bird, but louder than any mocker ever called. After a few moments, the call came back to him. Sleepy and Artemus were on their way, hurrying through the brush and over the rocks. Hashknife called again, but quietly this time, and the answer came back immediately.

In a few moments they forced their way through the mesquite, and Hashknife said:

"Step easy over there, I've got us a couple pets."

"Who are they?" asked Sleepy.

"I never peeked yet. Didn't want to light too many matches. Here's the lay-out," he explained, and told them what had happened.

"You mean—there's a trail into El Diablo?" asked Artemus.

"Go over and look at them two horses," said Hashknife.

"What for?"

"See if they've got wings."

"I'll be a nurse to a dinny-sour!" gasped Artemus.

"What's next?" asked Sleepy.

"Alexander Hamilton Montgomery and Sally Harder are down there," replied Hashknife. "No doubt this feller turned Sody loose, and gave him a gun—whoever Sody is — and he's on their trail. We've got to beat Sody to it."

"A shack down there, Artemus," said Sleepy. "Does that mean anythin'?"

"Nutriment!" grunted Artemus. "Food! What are we waitin' for?"

"I could eat a snack," admitted Hashknife, "but we've got work ahead of us tonight. C'mon and go easy. We don't know this trail, and we don't know what's at the end of it. I'll go ahead, and yuh better dig in yore heels, because it must be steep. And hang to the inside, gents; it's a long ways to the bottom. C'mon."

The trail was rather narrow, twisting along the side of the canyon wall, and it seemed well screened with brush. It was dark down there, too; so dark that they brushed in close to the inside wall, feeling ahead for each step, as they went deeper and deeper into the depths of El Diablo.

They finally reached the bottom, still in thick brush, but they were able to find the opening which led to the shack. There

was no light in the place. They felt along the rough wall, until they discovered the door, which was not fastened.

"Go easy," whispered Hashknife. "There's still the man they called Sody to contend with; and any of this gang are as dangerous as rattlers."

There was no one in the shack. They lighted a candle and looked the place over carefully.

"Beans!" grunted Artemus, grabbing a can and tossing one to Sleepy.

Hashknife picked up an end-gate rod from a wagon, which had been bent into a branding-iron. It was a small U; too small to constitute a brand by itself. Sleepy and Artemus were cutting the tops out of cans, with their pocket-knives, when a voice said from the doorway:

"Don't move, or I'll drill all of yuh!"

It was Sody. There was blood on the side of his face and his left eye was nearly swollen shut, but he was as mean as a wolf.

His good eye took in the situation, but he seemed at a loss what to do next. The candle flickered in a draught from the doorway, causing their shadows to dance on the wall.

"Trapped yuh, eh?" he muttered.

Hashknife smiled. "You're the one who is trapped," he said quietly.

"Me?" Sody leaned forward, his knuckles white, as he gripped the gun in his right hand. "How'm I trapped?"

"Behind yuh!" exclaimed Sleepy. Sody's nerves were not in good shape, because he fell for the oldest trick on earth and before he could turn back, Sleepy's can of beans hit him square in the head. It knocked him off balance, and before he could recover, Hashknife knocked him all the way down, and took his gun.

Sleepy recovered the can of beans and continued to open it. Artemus sat down on a corner of Sody's bunk and ate beans off his knife-blade.

Sody recovered quickly and glared one-eyed at them.

"Where's the dude and the girl?" asked Hashknife.

"What are yuh talkin' about?" asked Sody. "Ain't nobody in the canyon but me. I'm a trapper."

"Yeah, I know," said Hashknife quietly. "Predator hunter, eh?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's it!"

"You let two of 'em get away awhile ago, but I got 'em at the top of the trail. They're all tied up for shipment."

Sody blinked his good eye. "Yuh mean —what do yuh mean?"

"How long have you been stayin' down here?"

"Oh, a long time. I built this cabin."

"Yeah—who for?"

"For me. Like I told yuh, I'm a trapper and—"

"I know. But you didn't trap us. Now, I'd like to have yuh tell me where that young fellow and the girl went. There's the ropes they had on—and the knife they used to cut 'em loose."

"Them old ropes? Shucks, them ropes have been there—"

"Since they cut 'em off. Remember, I was at the top of the trail. One of yore bunkies saw the lantern, and came down here to see what you was doin'. I knocked out the other one and tied him up. When this other *pelicano* came back, I let him tell me all about it in the dark, before I packed him with his pardner. So don't try to tell me about you bein' a trapper. Yore name's Sody, ain't it? Which way did they go, Sody?"

"I—I don't know. Hell, I couldn't find 'em—and I know the canyon. Mebbe they fell into a pot-hole. There's a lot of 'em, deep as hell, where the water used to go out. They'll never get out, if they ever fell into one."

Somewhere a cow bawled softly. Hashknife looked intently at Sody.

"You don't happen to trap cows down here, do yuh, Sody?" he asked.

"No, I—" Sody hesitated and looked the other way.

Hashknife picked up the wagon-rod and looked at Sody.

"For instance," he said, "yuh can take a little iron like this and make a JR out of a Quarter Circle H. It won't be perfect, but it'll pass. And yuh can also put that little U iron on the end of an R, and make it JR. And then yuh can complete the circle from a quarter circle, or from a rocker on the Rockin' R brand."

Sody took a deep breath and looked one-eyed at Hashknife.

"Is yore name Hashknife Hartley?" he asked huskily.

Hashknife nodded. "Yeah, that's my name. Wasn't expectin' me, was yuh, Sody?"

"They—I—we knowed you was around. Damn 'em, I told 'em—aw, what's the use. You got Slim Sherrod and Tex McCall—and Jack Rett is dead."

"Who else is in the gang, Sody?"

Sody glared at Hashknife. "You've found out so damn much—find out the rest. I'm keepin' my mouth shut."

"And one eye," added Sleepy, throwing the can aside.

"Tie him up," said Hashknife. "We're wastin' time here."

WHILE Sleepy and Artemus trussed Sody tightly, Hashknife examined the shack for any more evidence. Under the bunk was a fifty-pound box of high-percentage dynamite, together with some fuse and caps.

There was extra bedding and plenty of canned goods, some extra cartridges and at least a hundred feet of half-inch hard-twist rope, to be cut in lariat lengths. The shack was fairly well equipped.

"Want us to gag him?" asked Artemus. "I've got a awful dirty rag."

"Might as well," remarked Hashknife. "No use makin' him listen to his own cussin'."

"I'll git you, if it's the last thing I ever do, you little bow-legged scorpion," wailed Sody.

## XIV

SALLY and Montgomery fought their way through brush and over rocks, guided by the lantern-light, until they were both exhausted. There were cattle all through the brush, staring dumbly at the light, and then crashing away through the brush. Then Montgomery stepped into a hole, fell full length and flung the lantern against a rock. That was the end of the illumination.

"Now we are in a fix!" groaned Montgomery. "We can't even move, without a light."

"Even if we can't go any place, they can't find us," said Sally cheerfully.

"When it gets daylight they'll find us, Sally."

"At least we're not tied hand and foot, Monty."

They snuggled in close together against a rock. There was a cold draught down that canyon, and they were not too warmly clad.

"I have still got that gun," he told her. "I couldn't hit the side of a barn with it. At least, that is what Artemus says of my marksmanship."

"I wonder what he is doing," mused Sally.

"Waiting for me to come back, I suppose. I would much rather have Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy looking for us."

"I guess we will just have to wait, Monty. It doesn't seem to be a very bright outlook—but anything can happen, especially in Arizona."

"You would say that, Sally—you're wonderful."

"I'm not wonderful. I'm tired and hungry and I'd like to cry—but what is the use? I wonder if they really sent a letter to your father, asking him for money."

"I wonder."

"Would he send it, Monty?"

"I don't know. He is a cold-blooded, deliberate man, Sally. They say on Wall Street that he always gets value received

on every deal. He would never understand the gravity of my position, until a complete investigation had been made. He might think it a hoax—and that I was at the bottom of it. I'm afraid we must eliminate Dad as a factor in this; he is too far away. I'm sorry, Sally."

"It's all right, Monty. He might as well keep his money, because I don't believe they would turn us loose, even if they got the money."

"Do you believe it is that bad for us, Sally?"

"I do. If your knowledge of a left-handed man got us into this—why would they ever turn us loose?"

"I—I wish I hadn't been in that bank," he said wearily.

"We'll see what happens in the morning," said Sally. "At least, we are free—now."

ABOUT an hour later a man on a jaded horse came down the canyon trail. He dismounted at the shack, hammered on the door, but got no answer, so he went inside and lighted a candle. It was Panamint, the cook from the Circle JR. He looked with amazement at the trussed-up Sody, and then cut him loose.

Sody was mad, as he massaged his cramped lips and jaws.

"What're you doin' here, Panamint?" he whispered.

"That damn sheriff and deputy," said Panamint huskily. "I was takin' Jack Rett's body back to the ranch, when I met 'em.

"I—I didn't think up a good lie; so I high-tailed it through the brush, leavin' the horse and body. Since then," Panamint stopped to catch his breath, "since then, I've been dodgin' 'em. But who the hell tied you up?"

"Hashknife Hartley and his gang," whispered Sody. "They're here—in the canyon—three of 'em. We've got to git out, Panamint."

Sody got up and leaned against the bunk. Panamint's eyes flashed to the half-open door.

"Hartley, eh? Maybe we can trap 'em, Sody."

"Don't be a damn fool, Panamint; I tried that. They hit me with a can of beans and knocked me down."

"Are you crazy?"

"I—I think so. I 'member 'em tellin' me that they knocked out Tex and Slim and tied 'em up at the top of the trail."

"Mebbe yuh didn't dream it — there wasn't a guard at the top. Here's my exter gun. You stand guard down here—I'll find out about Tex and Slim."

Sody's hand shook as he took the gun.

"They whopped yuh in the eye, eh?" remarked Panamint.

"The dude done that. He got a hand loose. Up here's where the can of beans hit me. Cut m' head, too."

Panamint went over to the doorway and looked out, listening intently. Then he said, "I'll find out about the boys. If anybody shows up—start shootin'."

"I've been learned," said Sody painfully.

He shut the door and sat down on the bunk in the flickering candlelight, the gun clenched in his right hand. Sody had little imagination, but he realized the gravity of the situation. Jack Rett dead, Slim and Tex tied up, possibly injured, Hashknife Hartley and his two men somewhere in the canyon, and the sheriff and deputy, very likely, still trying to find the trail into the canyon.

"If they git me, I'm a goner—sure," breathed Sody. "Damn that dude! I knowed it wasn't a good scheme. The rest of 'em, in and out, havin' a chance to keep their damn skins — and me, hived up here—"

Sody stiffened. He heard brush breaking outside. He drew back the hammer on his gun, every muscle tensed.

The door was flung open and a man sprang in. The candle flickered so badly that the illumination was almost nil, but Sody pulled the trigger, and the man went

sprawling against the opposite wall. Slowly Sody got off the bunk, coughing a little in the acrid smoke.

"Panamint!" he said huskily. "Damn you, Panamint, why did yuh—"

"You shot me!" husked Panamint. "You —fool! The—sheriff—is—comin'—down —the—trail. I—I—you—fool."

Panamint sprawled against the wall, his voice stilled. Sody stared wide-eyed into space.

He had killed Panamint. That was funny. He leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. Trapped! The sheriff coming down the trail! Sody's eyes turned toward the bunk. Dynamite! Of course! If I had time—

He acted swiftly. The cover was loose on the box, and he worked feverishly to pour the yellow sticks into a gunnysack. A full box of detonating caps and a coil of fuse went into the sack.

"Them holes have been bored for a year," he muttered. "Damn 'em, I can seal up this canyon so damn tight that nothin' but a buzzard can ever get out."

He swung the sack over his shoulder and went to the doorway, where he listened for several moments. Then he slipped out into the darkness, and began crawling through the brush in the general direction of the trail. Finally he stopped and flattened on the ground.

"Got to wait for daylight," he muttered. "Trail too dangerous, and I can't find the holes in the dark."

## XV

HASHKNIFE, Sleepy and Artemus were having a hard time in the darkness. There did not seem to be any trails. Artemus wanted to go back and get another can of beans.

"Forget food," advised Hashknife. "Somewhere in this hole are the dude and Sally Harder. We've got to find them. And no yellin'. We'll start searchin' at daylight."

"Mebbe they've already fell into a hole," said Artemus.

"You have beautiful thoughts," said Sleepy.

"That's plain hunger. I'd feel different, if I had more beans."

Later they heard the shot that killed Panamint, but had no idea where it had been fired. Far up on the opposite rim of the canyon a coyote wailed mournfully. It was cold down there among the rocks and brush, as they huddled together, waiting for the first streak of daylight.

Gradually things began to take shape. Daylight would be later deep in the canyon than on the rim. Hashknife watched the cliffs near the rim, and as soon as he could see them in vague detail, he spoke to the others and they got to their feet, stiff and tired.

"This is a terrible big canyon," said Artemus. "Yuh could hide a herd of dinnysours in here and never find 'em in a month of Sundays."

Hashknife led the search. He had a sort of an idea where the cabin was located, and he knew they were not very far from it. That shot might indicate that some of the gang were still in the canyon, and there was danger of an ambush.

After fifteen or twenty minutes of worming through the canyon, they ran into several head of range cattle, branded with both the Quarter Circle H and the Rocking R.

"They bring 'em in here in small bunches and alter the brands," said Hashknife, "and then they send 'em on to the Circle JR."

"Smart," remarked Artemus. "Smart as hell."

"Yeah," said Sleepy dryly. "Very smart."

"Until they started mixin' murder with rustlin'," said Hashknife. "Come here, Artemus. I'll boost yuh up on top of this rock, and yuh can climb to the top of the pile. Maybe you can see somethin' from there."

Dawn found Sally and Montgomery sore and stiff. They, too, had heard the one shot fired, but had no idea where it had been fired. They had enjoyed little sleep.

"I'm a sight," said Sally wearily.

"The one sight in the world that I want to see," said Montgomery.

They looked at each other and tried to laugh, but it was only a grimace. Montgomery rubbed his stubbled jaws and looked with weary eyes at the piles of brush-grown rocks. Suddenly he blinked. On the top of a high pile of rocks he had seen a man, and the top of those rocks was not over a hundred feet away.

He picked up his revolver, his eyes on the rocks. Sally saw the expression on his face, and followed his gaze. There *was* a man there and he stood up in plain view, looking around.

The dude had a vague idea of marksmanship. He lifted the big gun in both hands, took an erratic aim and pulled the trigger. The heavy report blasted back from the sides of the canyon, and the man on the rocks seemed to jump straight up and sail off into the brush.

Alexander Hamilton Montgomery dropped the gun and yelled at the top of his voice:

"Artemus! Artemus Day!"

"Have you lost your mind?" asked Sally nervously.

"That was Artemus!" choked Montgomery. "Didn't you see his legs?"

Then he yelled for Artemus again, and the voice echoed back and forth along the rocky walls, as though a dozen voices were yelling for Artemus.

In about two minutes Artemus called, "Is that you, Mr. Montgomery?"

"Yes—come quick!" replied Montgomery.

In another minute or two, Hashknife, Sleepy and Artemus came squirming through the brush.

"Yo're all right?" asked Hashknife anxiously.

"We're all right," laughed Sally. "Don't we look it?"

"How did you find us, Artemus?" asked Montgomery.

"Just a moment," interrupted Hashknife. "This is no time to tell our life history. Do you know which way to that shack?"

"Back that way," said Sally, pointing. Hashknife nodded.

"That's what I thought. Come on, and go carefully, because we don't know what's ahead of us. Somebody fired a shot last night over at the shack, I think."

"We heard it," said Sally. "Do you think we can get out of here?"

"That is in the laps of the gods, Miss Sally. Keep as low as possible, because yuh never can tell where a dry-gulcher might be planted."

"Have you seen my father lately?" she asked.

"Not lately. No more talkin'—please."

JIM MARTIN, the sheriff, and Manana Higgins found the trail into the canyon, and they found their way down to the hidden shack. They heard the shot that killed Panamint, but they did not know who fired it. In fact, they didn't know Panamint.

They examined the cabin, found the cut ropes, and did a lot of wondering what had happened there.

"It's sure got me beat," declared the sheriff. "I never knew there was a trail into this canyon before. Who is this feller—and who shot him?"

"Anyway," said Manana, "this canyon is out of our county, Jim."

"I can still wonder, can't I?"

"Uh-huh. As far as that goes, who killed Jack Rett? And what's the Circle JR doin' over here. Hell, this is miles off their range, Jim. And where's Hashknife and Sleepy and Smoky Day?"

*"Quien sabe?"* replied the sheriff. He picked up the candle and examined the floor near the bunk.

"What's all this fresh sawdust on the floor, Manana?"

"I dunno. I noticed it a while ago. Wait a minute! That's sawdust out of a dynamite box. There's the box, two-thirds empty."

"Dynamite? Who'd be usin' dynamite here? Why—that's funny."

"Funny—yeah," agreed the sheriff. "I don't like this layout. Manana, you go to the top of the trail, while I watch down here. If anybody tries to come in here—stop 'em."

Manana hurried away to the trail, and Jim Martin sat down against the shack, trying to puzzle out the reason for the shack in the brush, and a dead man in the shack.

Finally he went back into the shack and searched the dead man, whose pockets produced a few dollars, a knife and some old keys. Deep in a hip-pocket of his overalls was a folded envelope, addressed to Jack Rett, Turquoise Springs, Arizona. The letter, scrawled with soft pencil, was smudged, but decipherable. It read:

> Got to lay low. Things bad here. You better mark that bunch and get them out safe and quick. Will let you know about things later.

And the letter was signed by the one initial M. Jim Martin pondered over the letter by candle-light. The letter was postmarked Antelope Flats. Someone in Antelope Flats had to lay low. The sheriff knew that to "mark the bunch" meant to brand some stock. He knew now that Jack Rett was a rustler, working in conjunction with someone in Lost Horse Valley. But who killed Jack Rett? Some of his own gang?"

The man on the floor could have answered those questions, but he was not answering any more questions. After a while Jim Martin went to the doorway. Daylight was coming. He went away from the shack and hunkered down in the brush. In that way he could watch the cabin, and not be trapped by anyone. Not over a hundred feet away, hidden in the brush, was Sody. He knew that one of the two men had gone up the trail. Panamint had said that they were the sheriff and deputy.

Gradually the canyon lighted. Jim Martin relaxed. He was tired from continual riding and loss of sleep. He and Manana had gone to the Circle JR Ranch, but found the place deserted. That fact had seemed queer; but they came back, only to meet a man on a horse, leading another horse, on which was the body of Jack Rett. The man got away, but they trailed him back to the close vicinity of the canyon.

Suddenly a shot rang out, not far away. Jim Martin was on the alert. Shortly after the shot was fired, he heard sounds, very much as though someone was yelling loudly. The multiple echoes made it inaudible.

Jim Martin was not tired nor sleepy now. If anyone came to that shack, he was going to make things uncomfortable for them. After a while he saw a moving object in the brush. It was only a flash. He kept watching the shack, and in a few moments a man, traveling with all the stealth of an Indian, came along close to the wall of the shack. He eased in against the corner and looked around at the half-open doorway.

"Hartley!" he said sharply. Hashknife slowly turned his head and looked toward the sound of the voice.

"Hyah, Sheriff." Then Hashknife turned and whistled the call of the mocker, paying no more attention to the sheriff, who came from the brush, gun in hand. In a few moments Sally, Montgomery, Sleepy and Artemus filed out of the brush. Jim Martin looked at them in amazement, as they all came around to the front of the shack.

Sody could see them, too, and began backing away, dragging his sack.

"Damn yuh," he snarled to himself, "I'll bury yuh down here, if it's the last thing I ever do. One man up the trail, but I'll

stop him. Give me about five minutes' start, and you'll never get out."

Jim Martin stared at Sally and Montgomery for several moments, and turned to Hashknife.

"How did you ever find 'em?" he asked huskily.

"The story's too long," replied Hashknife. "When we're out of this canyon I'll tell yuh all I know."

"Who's the dead man in the shack?" asked the sheriff.

"Dead man? Oh, yeah—that shot in the night."

Hashknife and Sleepy went in with Jim Martin.

"That's Panamint," said Hashknife. "He said he was a cook—but he was here to look after things for Jeff Rett. Martin, this is where they misbranded Quarter Circle H and Rockin' R cattle, and made 'em Circle JR."

"By gad, that works out!" exploded the sheriff. "I got a letter from this man's pocket—what's the matter, Hartley?"

"That sawdust!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Look, that box of dynamite is nearly empty. Get out of this cabin—quick! It might be—scatter around out there—I'll be back!"

And while they stood looking in amazement, Hashknife was running swiftly

through the brushy trail, heading for the way up the wall of the canyon.

"What in hell bit him?" gasped the sheriff.

"Search me," replied Sleepy foolishly. "He's scared, I tell yuh."

"Scared?" queried the sheriff.

"I didn't mean it that way."

"It was that dynamite," said the sheriff. "Mebbe he's got an idea that somethin' is wrong. I wonder—"

"That's right!" blurted Sleepy. "That box was full last night. Maybe they're goin' to dynamite the trail!"

Hashknife had the same idea. Men as desperate as those would have some way of frustrating an attack. He was running up that steep trail, stumbling along, trying to prevent anyone from burying them in that canyon. It was hard work, and his already tired legs almost refused. Up and up he went. He had never seen the trail in daylight before. It twisted and turned, dug fairly deep in the canyon wall.

Then it came up along the face of a sheer cliff and made an abrupt left-hand turn on solid rock. Hashknife's lungs were aching from the strain, and his eyes were full of perspiration, when he saw the crouching figure against the inside wall of the trail.

It was Sody, working feverishly to fill a hole with sticks of dynamite. Hashknife stopped twenty feet away, but Sody didn't hear him, nor see him, because his back was down the trail.

"Don't move, Sody!" gasped Hashknife. "Yo're through, Sody!"

He saw Sody's shoulders move convulsively, but the man said nothing.

"Get to yore feet, Sody," ordered Hashknife. "One move, and I'll shoot yuh. This is Hashknife Hartley."

Sody did not turn his head, and Hashknife could not see his hands.

"You'll never take me, Hartley," said Sody. "There ain't no rope long enough to ever hang me."

"Rope or bullet, Sody—they both kill."

The sack of dynamite was near Sody's right foot, and on top of the sack was the box of detonators. And before Hashknife had any idea of the man's intentions,

Sody drew his gun and fired it squarely into the box of detonators.

Hashknife was knocked flat on the trail by the explosion, which fairly rocked the side of the hill. Rocks rained down, and slides of loose rubble came falling, almost burying Hashknife. He had several cuts on his head and face, but was more dazed than hurt.

Of Sody, there was no trace. Nor did his blast injure the trail. The rock was too hard for that unconfined dynamite to do more than crack it, and a few chunks sloughed off into the canyon. Hashknife examined the spot. He could see the drilled holes, where Sody had planned to blow away a huge section of rock, making an exit impossible. There was no way around. The Lost Horse Gang had planned well.

Slowly Hashknife went down the trail. The others were coming to meet him, and they went up together.

"He deliberately blew himself up?" asked the sheriff in amazement.

"He didn't like ropes," replied Hashknife. "I don't blame him."

"What are you carryin', Smoky?" asked the sheriff.

"Seven cans of beans," replied Artemus. "I went back and got 'em. It was all they had left."

## XVI

THE town of Antelope Flats was in a state of suspense. Volunteer searchers combed the valley, while the people in the town ignored business, waiting and watching for some word, wondering what had become of Hashknife, Sleepy and Artemus, together with the sheriff and deputy. They argued that some of them should be back soon.

Flint Harder came to town early each morning and spent the day, and far into the evening, sitting in his buckboard in front of the hotel. He did not curse anyone now. He saw Nell and Mrs. Long come to the jail to talk with Danny Long. Alphabet Anderson was acting as jailer. Swede Olson sat around the livery stable, drinking gin with Anderson and Joe Le Blanc, the blacksmith. There was nothing else to do.

A telegram came for the sheriff, and Alphabet opened it. The message was from Alexander Hamilton Montgomery's father, and read:

WIRE MORE DETAILS. WILLING TO PAY THE MONEY UNLESS THIS IS A HOAX.

"What's a hoax?" asked Alphabet. He pronounced it "ho-ax."

"Das is a grubbin' hoe," said Swede. "Yust like pick-ax."

Swede took the telegram and examined it.

"Yames A. Montgomery," he read. "Maybe dat sheriff is buying a hoe-ax from Montgomery Vard."

"Sure," agreed Alphabet. "You are smart man, Svede."

"Ay am damn fool," gloomed Swede. "Pass de yin, Yoe."

"By gar, this telegram sound like those sheriff is try for sell hoe-ax to Mr. Montgomery," said Joe Le Blanc. "He say he pay the money if this is *not* hoe-ax."

"Oh, he don't want one, eh?" queried Alphabet. "Vell, can you beat that? He don't know a hoe-ax ven he sees von. Svede, you are drunk."

"Yah, su-ure," admitted Swede.

Mrs. Harder and Mrs. Long came from the jail, after their talk with Danny. Alphabet Anderson let them have the run of the place. After all, he was only jailer, pro-tem. They came up the street, going to the post office, and had to pass the Quarter Circle H buckboard.

Nell Harder stopped and looked at Flint, and for several moments they looked at each other. Mrs. Long went on a few steps, but stopped.

"No news, Mr. Harder?" said Nell.

He shook his head slowly. It was the first time she had spoken to him since long before she and Dean had been married.

"I'll go to the post office, Nell," Mrs. Long said, and went along.

Flint Harder looked at Mrs. Long, as she went up the street, and then turned to Nell. "Come over here," he said huskily.

She walked over beside the buckboard and he slid painfully over to the other side of the seat. She climbed up. Neither of them spoke for a long time. Finally she said:

"Did you send me some money?"

"What made you think that?" he asked.

"I got three letters," she replied quietly. "The envelopes had all been addressed by the same man. One contained two hundred, one contained five hundred, and the last one one hundred dollars."

Flint Harder scowled thoughtfully. "You got *three* letters, Nell?"

"Yes."

"Well, I—I don't know—we won't worry about them."

"There won't be anything to worry about—if Sally comes back," she said.

"No," he said, "there won't be anything to worry about. You'll come out and live with us, Nell. I've thought a lot about things—lately. I'm not half as big as I thought I was. I've always known that I was a fool. I wanted to hate everybody. I didn't want any friends. You know that."

"Dean always said you wasn't like people thought you were."

"He did? Nell, you're not sayin' that, just because—"

"No, I'm not."

"God, what a fool I was! That day he came out and asked me for money, and I laughed at him. A hundred dollars. I laughed at him—and see what he done. I drove him to it, Nell—my own son. Don't shake yore head—I know. I've had time to realize.

"I guess it was Hartley, that tall cowboy. He knows more what was in my heart than I did. He made me sit down and think. I hope he comes back so I can thank him."

"You're not the same," she said quietly, "and I'm glad. I don't want anybody to hate me."

"I didn't hate you. I didn't hate Dean. And, by God, I don't hate Jim Martin! Do you hear that? I hated myself—and I thought I hated all of you. My soul was warped. Hartley told me what was wrong with me."

"I'm glad you don't hate Dad," she said simply. "I've had time to think things over—since Dean died. Dad was not to blame. Mr. Hartley told me that it was fate—not my father. Life is like that, he says."

"I know, Nell," he said gently. "We've got to go on, doin' the best we can. I don't believe I've got a friend on earth. I realize that—now. But maybe I can get some of them back. If I can't—it's my fault. But tomorrow I'll send the boys over and move your stuff to the ranch. You'll come, won't you, Nell?"

"Yes, I'll come," she said quietly.

"I wonder if Mrs. Long would come, too, Nell. She's alone. I'll do what I can to help Danny. I can get him a good lawyer. I believe a good one can tear hell out of Swede's testimony."

Suddenly his eyes clouded and he shook his head.

"I almost forgot Sally," he said huskily. "Why don't some of them come back? It's hell—sitting here—watching."

Andy Vincent, the elderly proprietor of the hotel, came to the doorway, spat dryly and walked back.

"Anythin'," he told the four walls, "can happen, if yuh wait long enough, but I never expected to live long enough to see them two settin' on a buckboard seat together."

A number of riders came into town, dusty and weary. Nick Higby and Pete Soboba were among them. They came past the buckboard, staring at Flint Harder and Nell. Higby shook his head at Flint Harder, indicating that there was no news. Mike Lassen and Ed North, the left-

handed cowboy from the Rocking R, rode in and tied their horses at the Prong Horn hitch-rack.

"For some reason," said Nell, "I have a feeling that Hashknife Hartley will come back with news. Dad and Manana are somewhere—"

"Yeah," said Flint Harder absently. "There's five of 'em—Hartley, Stevens, Jim Martin, Manana Higgins—and that damn bow-legged pest—Smoky Day. I—I want him to come back—for just one reason."

"What reason is that?" asked Nell.

"I want to ask that little, bow-legged devil who he addressed those other two envelopes for."

IT WAS about eight o'clock that evening when the caravan came in behind the hotel. Slim Sherrod and Tex McCall were together on one horse, and they were quickly placed in jail. Then the rest of them came into the hotel from the rear. Vincent gasped and almost fell off his stool behind the counter when he saw all the missing persons.

"Your father—out there in the buckboard!" he exclaimed, pointing. "He's been there every day—all day, Sally."

She went out to him, while Hashknife, Sleepy, Jim Martin and Manana conferred quietly. Then they went out, followed by Artemus Day, and they crossed the street, ignoring the two people in the buckboard.

The hitch-rack at the saloon was full of horses, and there was a crowd in the saloon. At the bar, among the others, were Nick Higby, Pete Soboba from the Quarter Circle H, and Mike Lassen and Ed North from the Rocking R. Bob Reynolds, owner of the Rocking R, was also at the bar. The air was foggy with tobacco smoke, as the men came in.

"Here they are! Now we'll know somethin'!" somebody said.

Hashknife was in the lead, a tall, gaunt, dusty-faced figure. Behind him came Sleepy, who moved to the right and stopped against a card table. Jim Martin, the sheriff, and Manana went on a little further. The faces of all four men were grim and determined. Artemus stopped near the front doorway.

Nick Higby, backed against the bar, a drink in his left hand, his left heel hooked over the bar rail, said, "Well, what luck, Hartley?"

Hashknife was looking straight at him, as he said quietly, "All the luck in the world, Higby. Sally Harder is with her father, and the dude is at the hotel."

A flash of fright showed in Higby's eyes. Soboba turned around slowly and

both Mike Lassen and Ed North shifted positions.

"You—uh—found them, Hartley?" queried Higby, his voice faltering.

"We found 'em, Higby. Before Jack Rett died, he sent you this."

Hashknife took a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to Nick Higby, who drew back.

"Jack Rett?" he said. "Before he died? What do yuh mean? He wouldn't send me a letter. When did he die?"

"I'll read it to yuh," offered Hashknife. "He said you'd understand. But"—Hashknife smiled with his lips—"I forgot the money he sent. Here it is—nine hundred and sixty dollars, Higby. The note reads:

*Ninety-six head of cows at twenty a head, nineteen hundred and twenty dollars. One-half for your gang, nine hundred and sixty dollars."*

"What in hell was that?" exploded Bob Reynolds.

"They had to sell 'em cheap, Mr. Reynolds, because they stole 'em," said Hashknife.

"Who stole 'em? Whose cattle? Mine?"

"Half of yours—the others from Flint Harder."

Nick Higby had the money in his hand, but he suddenly flung it on the floor.

"Damn you, that ain't my money!" he exploded.

"Then it belongs to Mike Lassen. By the way, Lassen, when Panamint died he had a letter you wrote to Jack Rett. It makes good readin'. Do yuh want me to read it to yuh—out loud?"

"No—I never wrote—I don't even know Jack Rett," denied Mike.

"Not even a good bluffer," said Hashknife evenly. "I remember the night the Texas Rangers caught you—"

"That's a lie!" snarled Mike. "I never was caught—what in hell are you talkin' about?"

"And the day you helped rob the bank," said Hashknife. "You had Lon Porter with yuh. He got shot, remember, Mike? You met Dean Harder and you *had* to shoot him. Lon was dyin'—and you couldn't afford—"

"That's a lie!" screamed Mike Lassen. "It was Nick Higby and—"

The action was almost too fast to follow. They were trapped; trapped by Mike Lassen's excited denial and statement. Guns thundered in the Prong Horn Saloon; eight guns, but four of them were faster. Mike Lassen and Ed North were down, flat on the floor. Pete Soboba went staggering into a card table, his finger still pulling the trigger, and the bullets smashing into the floor. Nick Higby, shocked by two .45's, still held to the bar, his hands empty. Not a man spoke after the last shot crashed out. Somebody coughed in the smoke. Higby's eyes were closed, and he was using every effort to keep upright.

From the doorway came Artemus' voice:

"Now, I hope we can go eat."

Nick Highby let loose and collapsed. Pete Soboba was on his hands and knees. He said in a choking voice:

"We made a mistake. Rustlin' was all right, but murder and kidnappin' wasn't—in—our—line."

JIM MARTIN came over to Hashknife and held out his hand.

"You had the right idea, Hartley," he said. "You said they'd convict themselves."

"Give a calf enough rope—" said Hashknife wearily.

The room was in an uproar. Men ran to get the doctor, others ran to see Sally Harder. Hashknife and Sleepy, half-starved, went outside. Artemus was doing a bow-legged dance on the saloon porch.

"Workin' up m' appetite," he said dryly. "How soon do we eat?"

Men were surging around them. Flint Harder, relying very little on his cane, was trying to shake hands with Hashknife, while the rest of Antelope Flats was trying to do the same thing.

"My son didn't do it!" blurted Flint Harder. "He never robbed any bank!"

"Yumpin' Yudas!" howled Swede Olson. "Danny never shoot him!"

"Danny Long's free!" yelped another.

Hashknife smiled down at Flint Harder. Sally and Alexander Hamilton Montgomery joined them.

"It's all right," said Flint Harder. "Nell is goin' to live with us, and Sally is goin' to marry this damn dude. How do yuh like that?"

"How do you like it?" countered Hashknife.

"I like it!"

"That's all that's needed," said Hashknife quietly.

Jim Martin had released Danny Long, and they came together. Hashknife smiled

slowly and said: "Flint Harder, I'd like to have yuh shake hands with Jim Martin."

They looked at each other for a moment, and their hands met. Artemus chuckled. Flint Harder said:

"Smoky, who sent those other amounts of money to Nell? You wrote the envelopes."

"I sent one," said Jim Martin. "Mine was for a hundred."

"Mine was for two hundred," said Alexander Hamilton Montgomery. "Was I wrong in doing it?"

"Son," said Hashknife quietly, "you were just right."

They slipped away from the crowd and went down to the little depot, where they hammered on the door until the agent came down from his living quarters.

"Any news about the missin' people?" he asked.

"Is there somebody missin'?" asked Sleeply.

"There either is, or I've been lied to."

"Everybody's accounted for."

Hashknife wrote a telegram to Bob Marsh. It read:

HENRY WEBSTER RESPONSIBLE FOR DEMISE OF LOST HORSE GANG. SLEEPY SENDS HIS REGARDS.

As they turned away, after paying for the telegram, Alexander Hamilton Montgomery came in.

"I better wire my father," he said. "He might be worrying."

"He prob'ly don't know yuh very well," said Sleepy.

The young man wired:

AM SAFE AND WELL BUT COULD USE THE TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS AS I AM GETTING MARRIED. I AM NOT GOING TO WRITE A PLAY OF THE WEST BUT I AM GOING TO LIVE IT. SALLY SAYS I'M AS FORKED AS A MESQUITE AND AS SALTY AS THE SEA. LETTER FOLLOWS.

"Sally must like you," said Hashknife.

"Why, yes, I believe she does. She says that anything can happen in Arizona—and I believe it has."

"Yeah," said Hashknife dryly, "I reckon she's right—it has."

An hour later two dim figures rode through the starlight, heading out of Lost Horse Valley. Their job was over.

"It's a real nice place—this valley," said Sleepy quietly.

"Yeah," agreed Hashknife, "but it's goin' to be peaceful for a while, until somebody feels that he can cheat the law."

"Uh-huh. Yuh know, pardner, about halfway between here and Isabella there's some tall hills off to the east. I saw 'em as we came in."

"High ones—and kinda blue," said Hashknife. "Yuh never can tell what yuh might find on the other side."

And there was only the jingle of bit-chains and the soft *plop, plop* of hoofs in the dusty road as they went on in the darkness.

**WHY NOT BE AN EXPERT ACCOUNTANT? YOU CAN!**

MORE and more opportunities—that is Accountancy's appeal to ambitious people like YOU! Government, industry, thousands of firms, are needing trained accountants. C. P. A.'s and executive accountants earn $2,000 to $10,000 yearly; new conditions are steadily increasing the demand! LaSalle trains you at home in your spare time; among our alumni are over 10 per cent of the C. P. A.'s in United States. Training prepares you for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Staff of C. P. A.'s personally supervises every phase of your training. You do not need previous experience, for we start you from the beginning. Numerous new opportunities now waiting in Governmental and industrial lines warrant your considering this subject carefully! So act now—investigate LaSalle Accountancy training's possibilities without delay.

*Write today for free 48-page booklet, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays"*

**LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY • A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION**
DEPT. 175-H CHICAGO, ILL.
25

*The Word for Bribery is the Same in Almost Any Language*

# BANGKOK AND BACK

## By EDWARD DALY

*Author of "The Inside Track," "Eagle at Bay," etc.*

THE money lay in the exact mathematical center of the bamboo table, American, Dutch and British currency notes to the value of one million dollars, lying there like the jack-pot in some fantastic poker-game.

Or so it seemed to Wayne Painton, the youngest of the three men sitting round the table. For it was a sort of poker game, with the one difference—that the three men around the table were not playing against each but were together with the same objective, each to serve his own country, against a common hazard.

Sir John Carruthers, Britain's foremost authority on the Far East was the oldest of the trio and did most of the talking. Suave, polished, he wore the striped trousers and cutaway of the diplomat in seeming defiance of the melting heat. Vanderzander, a big, sprawling Dutchman had spent the greater part of his life in the Malay archipelago and appeared as indifferent to the heat as Sir John, but Painton, pinch-hitting on this mission for two senior colleagues in the state department at Washington, conveniently taken ill at the last moment, had already decided that for those who like their clothes permanently glued to their backs, Singapore was just the place they would like.

"We might as well, gentlemen," Sir John was saying, "review briefly the task that lies before us here." Pushing back his chair, with his eyes he invited the other two to follow him to where a large wall map took up the full extent of the end

wall of the room. "Here," the Englishman said, "is the Isthmus of Kra." Painton watched the old man's finger delicately trace the narrow causeway that connects Siam with the Federated Malay States. "And here"—the finger swept eight hundred miles southward on the map—"is Singapore, where we are, on the Straits of Johore."

Painton's eyes sought out the Dutchman's, watching Sir John in attentive silence. Vanderzander frowned humorlessly at the American's wandering attention and Painton hastily returned his attention to the map.

"Our Japanese friends"—Sir John said it as though he really meant it—"want to cut a canal through here." The finger had swung back to the point where the Isthmus thins to its narrowest point. "And that," Sir John said, dividing a smile between the other two, "is where we come in."

"London doesn't want it; Washington doesn't and the Dutch government in exile most emphatically does not want it. On the other hand," Sir John continued blandly, "it's Siamese or Thailand territory, and, for a consideration, they are willing to lease the land for such a project to the Japanese."

The Englishman dropped his bantering tone and turned his back to the map, better to face his hearers. "The fortress of Singapore serves a dual rôle; it straddles the trade routes of this end of the Pacific and it stands guard over ninety per cent of the world's supply of tin and rubber, some of its very best oil and quite all of the world's quinine. When you've had malaria," he said, smiling in Painton's direction, "you'll realize how important quinine is."

"Of course, such a canal would take five years to build," Vanderzander put in.

"Quite true," Sir John agreed, "but nine tenths of wisdom is being wise in time. Accordingly, our three governments have subscribed one million dollars in equal amounts to be applied in the right place and thus avoid a war. For make no mistake, gentlemen, such a project means war. If that canal were cut, it would divert the trade routes for one thing. Look at the map again; it's really an ideal position for a canal," Sir John conceded, "but we don't want it. We don't want—any one of us—to see Singapore high and dry and we don't want to share control of these islands and their resources with the Japanese. For that would be the case if the Japanese were in control of such a canal. The thin end of the wedge, as it were. And so—" Sir John cast a whimsical glance back at the money on the table.

"We start handing a little gravy around."

"Exactly," Sir John agreed with Painton. "Tomorrow morning, all three of us fly to Bangkok. There's a Japanese mission there already—"

"There always is," the Dutchman commented dryly.

Sir John glanced at his watch, frowned, and Painton took the hint and rose to go. "I have to get this little nest egg to the airport," the Englishman said in parting.

BEFORE returning to his own hotel, Painton decided to take a short walk through the unfamiliar city. His mind on what he had just heard in the Englishman's hotel, he remained outwardly unaffected by the assiduous attentions of the guides and touts that dogged his footsteps.

Fundamentally, he was opposed to bribery, considering it beneath the dignity of the United States Government, but with Japan rampant, England preoccupied and the Dutch beaten at home, these were not the times for academic niceties. The proposed canal, a long cherished Japanese dream to wrest control of the Malay Archipelego away from the British and the Dutch, was of vital concern to the United States. The idea that a joint fund be set up between the three interested democratic countries had been his own, tentatively suggested and gladly accepted by a dis-

traught department head. "And now, by a curious trick of circumstance," he reflected, "it's up to me to see that it works."

His haphazard progress had brought him within the region of the waterfront. A few passers-by glanced curiously at the tall, lithe figure of the young American, their attention arrested by his look of intense preoccupation. There, within the sweep of his vision, lay the gray-coated battleships, the serried ranks of freighters, and Singapore's impudent mosquito fleet, weaving fantastic patterns across the broad water. He closed his eyes to the sight and his ears to the sound of all the furious activity before him, picturing to himself this harbor, derelict of all commerce, as, if the canal were built, it would surely be. And that would be only the beginning. The United States would be cast in the rôle of suppliant for commodities essential to the nation's health and industry. Five years away, perhaps, but his service in the state department had taught him to take the long view; that a nation must think in centuries, if it is to survive.

Retracing his footsteps, he paused, curiously, to survey a street doctor preparing a prescription for a Chinese woman with a sick baby.

What the doctor lacked in sanitary methods he made up in religion, for the whole operation was conducted with a hoarse appeal, directed at any random deity, chanted by the doctor and reaching its crescendo as the baby swallowed the medicine. The passers-by yelled encouragement at the baby, the baby yelled back and the doctor, literally, was yelling to the high heavens.

In the general pandemonium, Painton irritably made the standard retort to a furtive little man, nondescript in cotton shirt and trousers, who had sidled up and was whispering in his ear.

"No, thanks, no dancing girls today." He had long ago ceased to wonder at the Asiatic's firm conviction that white men are insatiable devotees to the dancing art.

The little brown man was insistent, however, tugging at Painton's sleeve. "I said, have you got rid of the money, yet."

Painton glanced at him sharply, at shrewd dancing eyes, deep in a nutmeg face; at the shielded F.B.I. badge covertly displayed in the other's hand.

"Well, for—" Painton studied the F.B.I. man, half in anger, half in amusement; angered because the department had considered it necessary to watch him, amused because the other was the least obvious government agent, he had ever seen.

"The money should be at the English airport by now."

"Good! Then I can go and eat. Willis is the name. Not watching you personally," Willis assured him apologetically, "but you had a third of a million with you. That much money and we'd watch the president." Without moving his head, Willis let his eyes range over the crowd. "Two others watching you besides me—that Jap over there and that dude Englishman with the Homburg hat. I can figure the Jap—they watch everyone on general principles—but the dude has me stumped."

"A petty thief?" Painton suggested, his eyes following the other's covert direction.

"Huh! Petty!" Willis was plainly shocked. "A third of a million may be hay to the state department but not in ours!" With a whispered, "I'll be around if you need me," Willis disappeared into the crowd, which, having finally through the power of numbers outyelled both the baby and the doctor, was dispersing happily.

Painton's eyes sought out the Jap, who was staring at him in fixed determination. The Englishman was less obvious though his concentration was just as great and moreover he had edged nearer as though bent on conversation. He wore a dove-gray suit, the Homburg hat, carried a gold-mounted cane and looked altogether too distinguished to be genuine.

"Jolly clever some of these chaps," the stranger announced having achieved speaking distance. His cane described an ele-

gant arc toward the doctor. "Jolly good on tropical diseases."

Realizing that the newcomer probably knew plenty about him already, Painton decided on a modified form of truth. "I'm a stranger here myself," he confessed, looking squarely at the other who had a frank, open countenance and the bearing of a successful salesman.

Within five minutes, the affable stranger had volunteered the story of his life. That his name was George Dalton; that he was a rubber planter from up country—this statement accompanied by another wave of the stick as if the rubber plantation were magically visible—and that he had come to Singapore "for a spot of fun and frolic."

His observation sharpened by Willis' warning, Painton detected an undercurrent of watchfulness in the other's joviality. For all that, Dalton was an engaging rogue—if he was a rogue—without very much finesse, and Painton reacted, pleasurably enough, to the other's suggestion that they have dinner together. He had no doubt but that Dalton was interested in the money he had brought from home; you can't carry a third of a million in currency without someone hearing about it. Well, he was too late for that. The other did not have the depth of character to be engaged in anything deeper. From the tail of his eye, Painton could see the Jap following them. That worried him. He would have called one of the Sikh policemen patrolling the street, had he not realized the futility of such a move. Singapore is full of Japanese.

JUST how effectively they kept track of his movements and knew of his intentions, he was to learn before he was very much older.

"Around seven, then," Dalton said, parting from the American on the steps of the latter's hotel. Painton smiled to himself as he watched the other disappear down the street, the cane arcing in a superb swagger, the general air of distinction slightly marred by the sweat-bands forming under Dalton's armpits.

The smile wiped itself off the American's face as he noticed the Jap taking up position across the street, watching him. Half a block away he caught sight of Willis watching the Jap. The presence of the F.B.I. man brought him a sense of reassurance, even permitting himself to wonder if anyone was watching Willis.

The insiduous enervation of the Orient was beginning to affect him, and he felt hot and tired as he entered the hotel. On the threshold of his room he paused thunder-struck. The room looked as if a typhoon had struck it; the bedding had been ripped from the bed, his trunks and suitcases ransacked. With a muttered oath, he seized the room telephone.

Flanked by two white-robed, barefoot servants, the Eurasian hotel manager came in response to his summons.

"You speak English?" Painton demanded angrily.

"I speak every language," the Eurasian responded modestly. "You must blame this disorder," he went on with an exquisite grimace, "on the Japanese servant you hired. There is no need," he chided Painton, "to bring personal bearers into the Hotel Eden. We have our own excellent servants, included in the hotel rates—"

"But, dammit, man," Painton shouted, "I hired no servant—"

"He said you did," the manager crowed triumphantly. "He said you did." The manager gazed at the American more in pity than in rebuke, and suddenly clapped his hands. Immediately, the two flanking servants exploded into furious activity, bringing order out of chaos within two minutes. Having done this, they took up position again beside the manager, the trio executed a neat about turn, turned again at the door, bowed in formation, and disappeared. That, they seemed to say, was the way the Hotel Eden did things.

Thankful that he had taken the elemen-

tary precaution of leaving his papers at the American Legation, Painton phoned Sir John Carruthers to inquire what the Englishman knew—if anything—about Dalton. Carruthers promised to check with the local police about the other Englishman. "Make your mind easy about the money," he added, "it's at the airport by now and probably surrounded by tanks."

THE Raffles Hotel, Singapore's most famous hostelry, is the meeting place for the great and the near-great of the Orient. At dinner with Dalton in the overly ornate dining room, Painton's gray eyes watched the other diners with a tourist's tolerance. At the next table to him two Chinese in brocaded silk were silently and methodically enveloping a vast array of dishes as though they were fattening themselves for market. Beyond them in a far corner he could see Sir John dining with a tall, loose-knit Englishwoman. The Englishman's eye caught his with a glance of delicately calculated invitation.

Painton excused himself a moment. Dalton watched him go in pained silence. He had been describing, with a wealth of financial detail, the profits that might be made from investing in "one of the nicest little bits of property in the F.M.S." that had just come to his notice and that could be bought for a song. It was a good story, carefully rehearsed, and its repetition had always earned him a nice livelihood. George Dalton's eyes followed the retreating American's back, and he wondered if he was losing his grip.

"Your friend," Sir John told Painton," is an English confidence man. Sells non-existent rubber plantations to what do you call 'em—?"

"Suckers?"

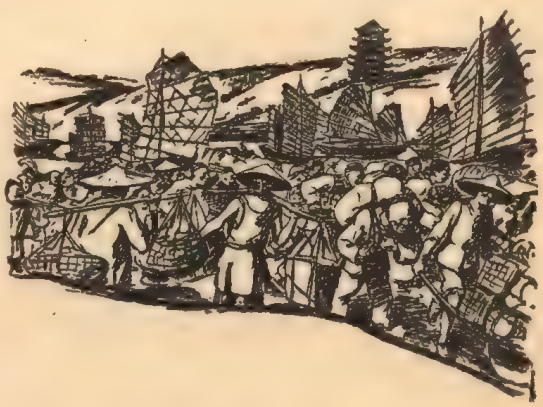
"Exactly. Otherwise harmless enough."

Back at the table Painton affected a suitable interest in Dalton's offers. The other had a fund of racy small talk and though his mind never strayed from business he did permit himself to go off at a tangent sufficiently often to avoid being boresome.

In one of the public Chandu houses, where opium is sold as licitly as ice cream is in New York, Painton took a couple of experimental puffs. Ten minutes later he was acutely nauseated. "It's always like that the first time," Dalton sympathized with him.

"Well, that's the last time for me," Painton announced. "Let's get out of here." The rest of the evening to him was a hodge-podge blur of gin slings, stingahs and the inevitable girls, lithe and brown, dancing the same slow, undulating rhythm, some clothed from head to foot, others in small but strategically located draperies.

The evening came to a sudden end at a cock-fight. In a sort of numbed disgust, Painton watched the matches, marveling at the dynamic energy of these feathered mites as they went for each other, while the Chinamen bet huge sums on the results, the Malays shrieked encouragement at the contestants and the white men and women, of whom there were many, watched in silence, their eyes as bright and beady-hard as the birds. Painton had seen cock-fights elsewhere, but here the birds, in addition to the steel spurs on their feet,



carried a small lead weight on the end of a short string tied to their necks. Watching, repelled yet fascinated, by the uncanny aptitude of the fighting birds in swinging this weight, he became suddenly aware that Dalton had left his side and was deep in

conversation with another white man, only one degree less exquisite than Dalton himself. From the elaborately careless glances they were throwing in his direction, Painton deduced that he was the subject of their conversation. When Dalton came back, much of the spirit seemed to have left him. He raised no objection to the American's decision to go home to bed.

"I'll stick around here for a while," he announced. "Any tonga'll take you back to your hotel."

Another tonga followed Painton on the way back to the hotel. In it he could see Willis. Behind Willis, pedaling furiously on a bicycle, was the faithful Jap.

"EVER flown before?"

"Oh, yes, quite a bit back home." Painton smiled toward the pilot of the Lockheed bomber who was to take Carruthers, Vanderzander and him to Bangkok. The opium he had taken had left him with the slight legacy of a headache and a dry mouth; otherwise, he felt none the worse for his experiences of the previous evening.

Carruthers and Vanderzander were in the back cabin of the bomber with the money; the American had asked and obtained permission to ride in the pilot's seat with Anstruther, the pilot.

Anstruther looked round for the last time; there was a crescendo of motors as the silver plane leaped forward, raced over the huge airfield, launching itself easily into the air and rising upward in great climbing sweeps.

Painton watched Anstruther's hands, noticing the slender strength of the aviator's wrists as he laid the plane on its course to the north. He watched the land unfold before him in a pictorial map, more vivid than his imagination, far clearer than any chart.

The pilot clung to the east coast of the peninsula which ran like a massive green-gloved finger almost due north and south with the Gulf of Siam on one side and the island-studded waters of the Bay of Bengal on the other. He saw the Isthmus gradually narrow and felt the pilot's hand on his wrist. Through the phones Anstruther said:

"The Japs want to cut a canal through there."

"Really—"

The pilot and Painton noticed together the other three planes. Three dun-colored streaks, fully five above their own twelve thousand feet, matching them for speed and course.

Painton studied them for a long moment. "Escort?"

Anstruther's face contracted in a small frown as he shielded his eyes with one hand to study the aircraft better. "Not that I'm aware of," he said. "For one thing they're not British ships."

Painton laughed. "You might as well know," he said. "There's a million dollars back in the cabin. I've had a comic opera bodyguard with me since I left Washington. Maybe it's the Siamese come to meet us halfway—"

"Hard to tell," Anstruther conceded. "But I doubt if the Siamese have three ships as fast as those. And they have no markings of any sort. That's against international law."

Painton laughed and the pilot forced a chuckle.

"Here they come," Painton said quietly. "Look out!"

The trio of planes, locked together in formation, had gone into a power dive. They dropped shrieking from the high, thin clouds, down and down, coming at the Lockheed like meteors.

Anstruther hauled back on the wheel and the ship nosed up angrily. The pilot's face was alive with angry amazement. "Now what the hell do those guys think they're up to!" he yelled as the three interceptors plunged past in a roaring curve.

Painton watched the altimeter rocket up, fifteen, seventeen—eighteen thousand feet. The pilot had his radio to his mouth.

"M aircraft, 17 squadron calling Singapore air base. Unidentified aircraft staging mock attack on me. Map reference 342761. Advise!"

"Mock attack, hell!" Painton announced trenchantly. "They're shooting at us!"

The three attackers had broken formation and were coming in individually, firing long range, ineffective bursts, which Anstruther dodged, his teeth gritting in helpless fury.

"Where's your guns and I'll have a crack at them."

"Hell's bells man, we don't have any guns. International law again—never carry guns into a friendly country. Here take hold of this transmitter and give base the dope on what's happening. Oh, you would damn you—"

In the most undiplomatic language he had ever used, Painton conveyed the extent of their hazard to a frankly doubting radio operator at the base. The American clung to his seat as Anstruther pulled the plane up into the wide parabola of a loop in an effort to confound his pursuers. "Not meant to be looped, these ships," he grunted with the physical effort, "but we'll at least show these yellow-bellies what a real airplane can do.

"Think they're Japs?" Painton asked quickly, having finally galvanized the radio man into action. The loop had given them a temporary breathing spell, and the American turned to watch the grim-lipped pilot checking his instruments.

"Sure they're Japs." The American followed the pilot's somber glance down to the ground and water below them. "This is the sort of fighting they excel at." A couple of miniature pops, audible above the roar of the motors, reached them from the cabin in rear and Painton suddenly recollected there were a couple of passengers behind them. Looking back, he had a quick vision of Sir John and Vanderzander, their heads outside of opposite windows and firing their revolvers in optimistic abandon at the planes above.

The pilot was at the radio again and Painton saw his attitude stiffen. He heard a few disjointed "yes-sirs" as he swiveled in his seat contriving to watch all three attackers.

"We're to land—if we can," Anstruther relayed, wryly. "Want to bail out?"

"Not me. I started this and I'm sticking."

"Better ask the others."

Painton glanced back. There was a look of rapt determination, amounting almost to contentment, on the faces of the two older men as they squinted along the barrels of their revolvers. "Want them to shoot me?" he demanded laughing. "Look out, here come our friends again."

Swish! The first diving plane roared harmlessly by, so close the Lockheed bucked to its slipstream. "They couldn't hit the side of a barn," Anstruther yelled contemptuously, yanking his ship into a groaning ninety degree flat turn.

His contempt was short-lived, for the second ship was on him, like a dark, vengeful rocket, pouring a merciless stream of shells into the unarmed Lockheed. The immediate background of noise made by the bomber's motors ended with a series of sickening grunts. There was a sudden, enormous silence, broken only by the scraping of the pilot's boots on the rudder-bar, the distant whine of the attackers and one single defiant revolver shot from the back cabin.

The full sense of their vulnerability dawned on Painton; above the Malayan jungles, three remorseless assailants and a helpless airplane. Paradoxically, the tiny, silent cabin felt cozy and the exhilaration of defiance surged through him.

"Get her down, Anstruther," he yelled encouragingly. His voice sounded loud and strident in the uncanny silence. "Damn them, don't give them the satisfaction of getting us!"

The ship felt loose and uneasy as the pilot swung her down in a series of descending curves like a falling silver leaf.

Painton had the same eerie feeling he experienced when he free-wheeled his automobile down a hill; under control but lacking the tautness of power a running motor gives. A senile, ragged volley of cheering seeped through from the back cabin as Anstruther neatly dodged another combined attack from the three Japs. It occurred to Painton that by rights he ought to be scared out of his wits, but the boiling anger inside him left no room for any other emotion.

The altimeter was down to four thousand and they were losing height rapidly. The jungle stretched down the peninsula like an emerald green ribbon with a short border of sand, the sand in turn fringed by white-capped water. The pilot read Painton's mind and broke the silence he had been maintaining for the last several minutes.

"We can make the sand all right," he said. "Then we'll have to run like hell for the shelter of the trees." The Japs, sensing Anstruther's intention, held their fire for a more certain killing. The two men in the rear had their faces glued to the glass dividing them from the front cockpit. Carruthers, bland as ever; Vanderzander, white with impotent anger. The pilot waved to them reassuringly.

The sand was hard and firm and they made an excellent crash landing. Painton undid his harness and that of the pilot as the latter struggled with the brakes. "When we stop, beat it for the trees," Painton yelled to the two behind.

A half-buried tree trunk, covered with sand loomed up before them, and the Lockheed caught the snag square on its undercarriage. The plane uptilted drunkenly. Painton threw his arms up too late to save his face. His forehead came in violent contact with the dashboard and he went out like a light.

WHEN he came to his head ached abominably. The air in the cabin was acrid with the smell of gasoline and hot almost beyond human power to suffer it. Beside him, the unconscious pilot, an ugly cut at his hairline, breathed in sobs. The American tried to stand up but the tilt of the cabin stopped him. His head spun but he managed to slide the top of the bullet-proof cockpit back and the cool air from the sea was like a reviving tonic. With great difficulty, he see-sawed himself and the unconscious man through the narrow opening. Leaving the pilot in the shadow of a wing with a chute as a pillow, he went aft of the ship to find the others.

He didn't have far to look. The Englishman's and the Dutchman's bodies lay spread-eagled on the sands, riddled with bullets, where the Japanese airmen had caught them in the open, halfway toward the sanctuary of the trees. Between them lay the heavy briefcase containing the million dollars.

Painton walked between them, his legs barely usable, still drunk from the gasoline fumes. He pulled the rip cord of his own parachute and covered the bodies, while his eyes automatically canvassed the empty skies, empty save for the wheeling vultures and the molten ball of the sun.

The pilot, save for a couple of broken ribs, where the control wheel had rammed him, did not appear to be seriously hurt. Painton found brandy in the medicine cabinet of the plane and fed some to Anstruther's lips.

It was beginning to grow clear to him what had happened. All around the plane and where the diplomats lay, the ground was freely pock-marked with bullet-holes, where the Japs had ground-strafed them. The forward cabin was encased with bullet-proof glass and that had saved both him and the pilot.

From somewhere out of the veiled shimmering heat, a Malay fisherman, dubious of his welcome, came toward Painton. The American knew no Tamil but in sign language begged the other's help. He offered the fisherman money which was refused, the Malayan posting himself by the two

dead men where he warded off the more venturesome of the vultures.

Arms linked behind his head, Painton sat down by the recovering pilot, giving his mind over to the bitter anger than consumed him. The opera bouffe quality of his mission was completely lost in the appalling murder of his two associates. As his mind cleared, he sought a motive for the attack on the Lockheed. If the plane had been destroyed without trace, the negotiations, then in progress between the Japanese and the Siamese in Bangkok, might be concluded in favor of the former. The resolution to get there and foil them subdued the monotonous throbbing pain in his head and with a glance at the pilot he rose to retrieve the money.

Before he had taken a dozen steps a squadron of Brewster Tomahawks swept up from the south, fanned down over the crashed plane in swift curiosity. Painton waved to them frantically, watched two of the ships break from the unit of nine circling above, land, and taxi to where he stood.

"I'm Wing Commander Farragut," the elder of the two pilots said, taking the situation in at a glance. "Sorry we couldn't get here in time." He listened in close-mouthed silence while Painton recounted their experiences, only interrupting to state that there was a Jap aircraft carrier offshore some forty miles.

"We checked up on her but there wasn't a plane on her decks. Odd that," the Wing Commander reflected aloud, "I doubt if they had time to stow them away. I have a hunch," he went on massaging the palms of his hands together, "that those three craft may not have got back yet. Keeping out of the way, as it were, till we clear off. If that is the case, I'm taking the law into my own hands and the hell with what London or Washington may think. I'll keep a patrol here to see that you aren't interfered with until one of our gunboats comes along to take you, Anstruther and the others off. In the meantime," Farragut glanced toward his other pilot under whose ministrations Anstruther was regaining consciousness—"we have a little job to see to."

"Take a poke at them for me," Painton said unsmilingly. "Take a poke for all of us."

Painton and Anstruther waited fully two hours before the gunboat hove into view, first a smudge on the horizon, then gradually assuming clarity and definition until it lay two hundred yards off the shore. Their wait had been broken occasionally by the far-off angry hum of aircraft, Anstruther insisting once, that he heard the sound of machine-gun fire mingling with the noise of the motors. Painton achieved one moment of pure contentment when he presented the Malayan, maintaining his watch regardless of the terrific heat, with a bill for one thousands dollars from the briefcase.

They watched a motor launch shoot away from the halted gunboat, grind on the pebbly sands, and an officer lead a dozen white-clad sailors at the double toward them.

The sailors worked rapidly and incuriously, carrying the bodies aboard, removing the baggage from the plane before they set fire to it. Anstruther asked the naval lieutenant if Farragut had found any trace of his attackers.

The naval officer became absorbed in his fingernails. "I think they found something," he admitted cautiously. "But nobody is saying anything. "That," said the lieutenant, "is always a good sign."

Captain Morris greeted Painton when he came aboard the gunboat as coolly as though the latter had just completed a successful day's fishing. "Got a lot of messages for you," he announced. "Being decoded now. You Anstruther, beat it along to the sick bay and get your ribs fixed." The captain watched Anstruther carefully essaying a gangplank, a small frown on his face. Turning to Painton he said confidentially, "If this business had been left

to the navy in the first place, there would have been none of this nonsense."

The captain asked no unnecessary questions and Painton busied himself with the lengthy messages from London and Washington. Boiled down, his instructions were to proceed to Bangkok in the gunboat, deliver the money to a Siamese minister named Prahat, and return on the gunboat to Singapore.

"I'll wait for you at Meklong," Captain Morris assured him, "Bangkok is some thirty or forty miles inland. Be there tomorrow morning—"

"What about the bodies?" Painton asked.

"My instructions are to bury them at sea," the captain answered quietly. "Come, let's see if we can hunt up a drink."

WHEN Painton stepped ashore at Meklong, the first person he saw was the F.B.I. man, Willis. Willis removed himself from the wall he had been supporting, laid off picking his teeth, and eyed both Painton and the bag he had chained to his wrist with impartial disfavor.

"Where the devil did you come from?" Painton demanded.

"Just bought a ticket on the civil airliner. Simple as that," Willis said. "The money all right?" he inquired anxiously. Painton nodded and Willis went on. "Hear you had a pretty rough passage. That comes of my letting you out of my sight. There's a big fancy car here to take you into Bangkok and I'm going with you in it. Orders," the F.B.I. man said as though to forestall an argument, "from Washington."

Willis led him toward the car parked outside the gate. There was a chauffeur in the uniform of a rather down-at-heels lion-tamer and a diminutive soldier with a massive rifle. The small soldier executed a military salute of terrific complications at the approach of Painton. Having achieved this, he climbed triumphantly in beside the chauffeur, the rifle—about the size and bore of a small anti-aircraft gun—between his knees.

Willis watched the maneuver in mild astonishment. "Believe it or not," he said sorrowfully, "this thing thinks he's guarding me."

The Cadillac rolled effortlessly through teak forests along badly paved roads to Bangkok. Sometimes they were halted by a working elephant dragging the felled timber across the road. The mahouts, brown bodies glistening with sweat and labor, waved to them from their precarious seats on the elephants' forenecks.

The car drove straight to the house of Minister Prahat, a low, flat-roofed bungalow in the center of a walled-in garden. A squad of ragged soldiers, blood-brothers, it seemed to Painton, to the diminutive guard, were gathered before the bungalow in his honor. The squad presented arms in the form of an obscure Swedish exercise as the car came to a halt.

A cluster of fat-stomached little girls, arms and legs tinkling with jewelry, advanced on Painton and Willis in tiny decorum as the two men stepped from the car, strewing flowers for the two Americans to walk on.

"Here comes the old boy himself," Willis whispered.

As affable a looking old ruffian as Painton ever hoped to see was standing on the bungalow steps waiting for them to approach. His white hair was like a puff of smoke and his general expression was one of gentle melancholy.

Painton made a low obeisance.

Minister Prahat made a low obeisance, nicely divided between Willis, Painton and the brief-case which Painton carried.

After formal introductions, Painton followed the minister into the bungalow. Sonorous phrases rolled limpidly from the latter's tongue.

"On behalf of my associates and myself I am happy to accept this little gift from the governments of the United States,

Britain and the Netherlands to be devoted to the cultural betterment of Siamese indigents," the minister said.

Counting out a million dollars, less a thousand, Painton wondered what Minister Prahat's conception of a large gift might be.

"I'll want your society's receipt for this little gift," Painton countered blandly. "Further than that, I'll want a formal agreement between your government to be delivered to me as representative of the three governments you mentioned, stating in specific terms that no contract exists, or is contemplated, for the cutting of a canal at any point in Thailand territory in the Isthmus of Kra."

"When a Siamese gives his word," the minister said with a touch of hauteur, "he considers it a bond."

"No agreement, no money for Siamese indigents," Painton declared flatly.

Minister Prahat glanced around the room, darkly paneled with mahogany. "Agreements can be broken," he announced with a sly grimace. "What use is a piece of paper to you?"

Painton decided on a little of the Sir John Carruthers technique. "The signatories will be the first people we will hang should we be forced to go to war to preserve our interests," he answered more blandly than ever.

"Hangings. Wars," Minister Prahat cried loudly. "Such talk between friends. Of course, you will get your agreement. Today, if necessary."

"Today, if you please." Painton thought of the 150-foot gunboat lying in wait for him outside Meklong. "I have a battleship," he said impressively, "waiting to take me—and the agreement—home."

"A battleship," the minister repeated. "Certainly, you will get your agreement today. But what," he cried, "of the entertainment I had planned for you. The dancing girls"—Minister Prahat rolled his eyes—"the boxing matches for which Siam is so famous. Our men," the minister said impressively, "not only fight with the fists but kick with the feet and gouge each other's eyes out as well. Great sport," the minister said enthusiastically.

Painton shook his head.

Minister Prahat shrugged his shoulders. "Very well," he said, "I will be back in two hours with the agreement. I have one big surprise for you, however, which you cannot refuse. A very dear friend of yours is here and anxious to see you again."

"A friend of mine?" Painton smiled. "Impossible. I know no one in Bangkok."

"Wait and see," the minister countered amiably.

PROMPTLY, two hours later, the minister was back. On his arm as he entered the room was George Dalton, more elegant, more jolly than ever.

"Welcome to Bangkok," he greeted Painton, at the same time making a superb gesture with his arms as though he were bestowing the freedom of the city on the American.

"What are you doing here?" Painton demanded suspiciously.

"Just a business trip," the other returned happily, "just a business trip."

Minister Prahat had the agreement. Drawing Painton's attention to the impressive list of signatories, he said, "If the worst comes to the worst, your hangman will have a busy day." His eyes followed Painton who was watching Dalton narrowly, his mind trying to trace a possible connection between the confidence man and the slaying of Sir John and the Dutchman.

Minister Prahat set his mind at rest.

"The trustees of the fund which your governments have founded," he told Painton, "have engaged Mr. Dalton to advise them in the investment of the fund."

Painton and Dalton exchanged smiles. Minister Prahat joined in and all three laughed long and merrily together.

# SAMURAI

## By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

*Author of "Uncle," "The Old Lady," etc.*

***"Hophead Strikes Again" Was What the Headlines Said—but Stan Dvorak Had a Different Idea***

STAN DVORAK, character actor, drove slowly toward the Para-Art studio, a sure sign his mind was on the work ahead of him. When he put his job out of his mind—and attended strictly to the business of driving—he rolled along at the maximum speed limit and frequently a little more.

Mechanically he stopped at an intersection and waited for the light to change. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed the grim black wagon the coroner's office sent out when necessary; a couple of police cars and a crowd of people. The light changed, he drove a couple of blocks, then suddenly exclaimed, "Hell! That wasn't a traffic accident back there. They send ambulances, not black wagons—"

He turned at the next corner, drove rapidly down a side street and parked a half block from the scene. A couple of uniformed policemen were keeping the crowd back, but Stan produced a pass given him by a captain of detectives whom he had assisted on occasion.

"John Edwards," the policeman read the signature, "that's good enough for me. And you are Mr. John Stanley?"

That was Dvorak's name in private life and he nodded. "Yes."

The policeman waved him toward the back door of a drug store. He kept his pass in hand and entered. A deputy coroner looked up, and recognized him. "Someone held up this poor devil last night and finished him."

"Night clerk, probably," Stan said. "They made a mess of things." Hundreds of bottles and packages had been thrown in a heap on the floor; drawers had been opened and the contents scattered. A fingerprint man was jealously guarding a partial print he had found and trying to find others.

Stan looked at the dead man. He was about forty, well built, and his torn clothing indicated he had put up a fight. One arm was twisted at a horrible angle. "Broken," the deputy coronor said. "The killer then choked him. Made a job of it, too."

"Anyone hear an outcry?" Stan asked.

"No," a detective answered. "We checked on the neighborhood. We haven't been able to find anyone who came in late, then left because no clerk was on hand to serve them."

"Chances are the killer purposely arrived late," Stan said, "then switched off the lights and locked the front door as soon as he had finished his man."

"Hophead," a detective said, waving at the debris, "looking for dope. And you can bet he never stopped until he found it." He grinned at Stan, remembering his clever work in past cases. "Hardly a big enough case for you to sink your teeth in, Mr. Stanley."

"You think it is a routine, hop-head killing?"

"So far, everything points to that," the detective answered. "If you have any theories, or clues——"

"I haven't," Stan admitted.

He drove slowly on to the studio. This time his mind was on the killing rather than his role on the sound stage. A newscast came on and Stan increased the volume of his radio. "Sometime last night, Joseph Hardwick, night clerk in a drugstore, was murdered. From evidence, police believe Hardwick put up a terrific battle for his life. A narcotic addict is believed guilty. The police are rounding up known addicts, believing the killer's face must show some signs of the battle. The wanted man must be of great physical strength, police believe, because he broke Hardwick's arm in a single twist.

"It all adds up," Stan reflected, "but somehow I'm not convinced two and two make four this time."

Moe Ganz, Para-Art's principal stockholder and producer was on hand when Stan arrived. "I ask you, Stan," he said, "is your mind on this hophead murder, or did you come for business?"

"I'm here to earn my miserable stipend," Stan answered.

"Miserable stipend!" Moe screamed. "You make more, even than I do, and you —— Phooie! Get into your make-up. They start shootin' ten o'clock."

It was eight-fifteen and it would take Stan nearly two hours to turn a sound, well-proportioned body, into a cripple with twisted limbs and pain-lined face. As soon as he reached his dressing room he called the coroner's office. "This is John Stanley," he said, "I'd like X-ray photographs of Hardwick's broken arm, if it is agreeable to you. Send me the bill."

STAN knocked off that afternoon, removed his make-up, swam a half hour in a pool to limber up his arms and legs, then returned to his dressing room. He slept a couple of hours, ate, then got into the make-up he used in the police work which he did for relaxation.

This was relatively simple. His legs, seemingly, were paralyzed and he crawled on his hands, dragging them behind him. He carried a battered hat containing five pencils, and this he shoved ahead of him. A car dropped him in the lower part of the city and he slowly crawled into view. Nickels, dimes and quarters fell into the hat. He thanked each one who stopped. Later the sum would be turned over to his fraternal organization which maintained hospitals for crippled children. His theory was that the money was given to aid a cripple and that was where it should go.

From time to time he stopped and listened to bits of conversation dropped by the men he knew were drug addicts. To a man they were puzzled by the murder. Stan returned home, convinced the old-time recognized addicts were not involved.

The X-ray films had been delivered to his apartment, and he studied them at length. In twisting his own body out of shape to create the different characters he played, Stan had not only studied bone structure, but had found it necessary to go deeply into the system of nerves. If his straps and clamps kept pressure clear of the larger nerves, he could work longer with less discomfort. Naturally he pos-

sessed a very broad knowledge of muscles. Again and again he had made clay models of crippled humans, then built the necessary apparatus to twist his own limbs into the desired shape.

Five minutes' study of the X-rays was enlightening. "Only one kind of a twist can fracture a bone like that," he said. "This *is* getting interesting. A dope addict didn't kill Hardwick. He was killed by a man who wasn't hopped up by the need of a narcotic, but by one who was calm, clear-headed and purposeful."

The coroner's office awakened him at six the following morning. "Another druggist was killed last night," a deputy said. He gave the address. "Thought you'd like to know."

"Thanks, I'll be right over," Stan answered.

He arrived a few minutes after the detectives. "This clerk's name is Henry Larkin," a deputy coroner said. "He gets home about two in the morning, usually sneaking in quietly so as to not wake up the rest of the family. This morning his wife woke up at five and noticed his bed was empty."

"The poor woman must have been crazy with worry," Stan said. "Naturally she remembered the Hardwick case."

"A prowl car crew was breaking into the store five minutes after she called," the deputy said. "A stock man is here to check on the narcotic supply."

The stock man, who was also the day manager, was looking on the supplies in bewilderment. "Was it necessary to throw stuff around? Couldn't he have opened drawers and shut them again?"

"Check on the narcotics," Stan suggested.

"We kept the supply in this," the clerk explained, picking up a box. "It was filled with advertisements and what-not to divert interest should any dope addict break into the store."

"This man's neck was broken," a deputy-coroner told Stan. "Not much of a fight this time. He wasn't as strong as Hardwick."

"Anyone notice suspicious characters around the store?" Stan asked. Hardwick's place had been near a residential section. It was a corner store, flanked by small merchants supplying the immediate neighborhood. This place was near the wholesale district. Its customers were mostly out of town people who came in for supplies—mining camp buyers, ranchers, small contractors and resort people. A modest retail business was carried on with those who lived in the low-rent area nearby.

There was a small soda fountain, and a magazine rack in one corner. One sale might be five cents and the next a hundred dollars.

"A drugstore has one drawback—" a detective was saying, "people from the street can't see what's going on in the back room."

Stan nodded. While the druggist might command a wide view of the front of his store, the little window in the partition limited the back room view to a few square feet.

Again Stan asked for X-rays of the broken bones. He called the studio at nine o'clock and asked for Moe Ganz. "This is Stan speaking—"

"I know! I know," Moe answered in a resigned tone, "I read in the paper about another murder and right away I guessed you was up to your ears in evidence. Sure, take the day off. Production don't matter. The public cryin' for a Stan Dvorak picture don't matter. I don't matter. Only a murder matters."

"I'm under foot most of the time," Stan reminded him, "so when something like this comes up——"

"Nice guy," Moe interrupted. And it sounded as if he half meant it.

Stan drove to the Hardwick store and talked to the man in charge. "Have you made an inventory of missing items yet?"

"Seems to be nothing except narcotics

gone," the man answered. "But we haven't made a thorough check, of course."

He drove to the police department and talked with Edwards. "What do you think?" the detective captain asked.

"It has an Axis slant to it," Stan answered. "Before the Hardwick affair a drugstore was prowled, but nothing was missed. It was a little place. The owner locked up at ten o'clock each night. Hardwick was larger, and this last night's killing took place in a semi-wholesale place."

"I get it," Edwards said. "First the Czechs, then the Poles, and last night the Yugo-Slavs. In other words this fellow is expanding too rapidly."

"Success has gone to his head and he operates on a larger scale each time," Stan explained. "Russia is next."

"Russia would be one of the big wholesale drug houses," Edwards said. "We'll have every small drugstore in the city under observation tonight, and he won't strike, but he might show up at one of the wholesalers. We'll post men in them, instructing the regular watchman to follow his routine, and be on the alert."

"They'll be alert," Stan predicted. "Every man in the drug game has the jitters right now."

"What about fingerprints on this last job?"

"One good set. We've telegraphed to Washington for a check up. Should get an answer before night," Edwards replied.

Stan went around and picked up the X-rays he had asked for. There was little doubt of the fact; Larkin's neck had been snapped by a man who knew how it should be done.

The afternoon papers were out as he drove home and the boys were yelling, "Hophead strikes again!"

There was an editorial pointedly asking what the police were for. It mentioned that the city was in a panic, which was far from the truth. The panic was confined to small merchants who operated at late hours.

Stan paced the floor of his apartment for some time. By a process of elimination he hoped to follow through on something that had come to his mind. Suddenly he called the Hardwick store. "Did you miss any mercury?" he asked.

"Wait, and I'll see," the clerk answered. He was gone several minutes. "We don't keep a large stock, but there isn't an ounce left. Of course, Hardwick might have sold it."

"You fellows must keep a record of the stuff you sell out completely," Stan suggested, "otherwise you couldn't restock."

"I'll look at the order book." Again he was gone several minutes. "We're out, but none has been reordered."

"Then it might have been stolen?"

"Yes, but what would a hophead want of mercury?"

"I don't know," Stan answered, then he hung up. He added, to himself, "If a hophead is really involved."

He called the Larkin store and received a terse, "No mercury in stock but none ordered. We don't have calls for small orders; usually ordered several pounds at a time."

"I see," Stan answered. "How does it come?"

"In metal flasks, each is about twelve inches in length and four and a half in diameter. Weight is seventy-six pounds," the other answered. "Anyone wanting that amount would call at one of the big places like Suddreth Laboratories, or Johnson-Hornig."

"What's it used for?"

"Scientific experiments," the other replied, "also by miners in reclaiming gold they would otherwise lose; and just now it is largely needed for detonators in bombs and shells."

"Thanks. Now if you've no mercury on hand and none on the order book, it seems as if the supply must have been made away with somehow—perhaps stolen?"

"You might have something there," the other admitted.

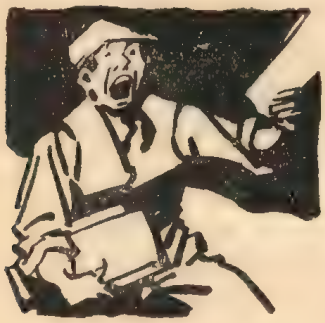
Stan hung up, jumped into his car and drove down to the waterfront. There were a number of coastwise ships loading and unloading, two British, several offshore American steamers and the Japanese liner, *Kamchatka Maru.*

"When does she sail?" Stan asked a longshoreman.

"Early Friday morning," he answered, "and she may be the last you'll see in this man's port for a long time. Things are getting pretty tight between Uncle Sam and the sons of Samurai."

"So I see by the papers," Stan said.

He drove to a quiet spot, put on a make-up which made him seem a dockside drifter and returned. He drifted along the water-



front, apparently giving the Japanese ship slight attention, but he wasn't missing a thing. At nine o'clock he called Edwards. "I just thought of something—put guards on at Suddreth Laboratories and Johnson-Hornig. Say, what day is this? Thursday isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Better make it snappy on those guards," Stan advised.

"Have you got your nose to a hot scent?"

"I think I have," Stan answered. "If anything happens, call me at this number." He gave the number of the public telephone near the waterfront. "And hurry those guards."

He walked several blocks, got into his car and parked it near the telephone. As he was getting out, the telephone rang. He ran to the instrument and said, "Hello."

"Edwards, speaking. The guards knocked on the front and back doors of Suddreth's," he reported. "No answer. They broke in and found the watchman out cold."

"Find out if there's any mercury missing."

Stan could hear Edwards' voice as he waited. "They can't tell," the detective captain reported. "There're two flasks near the delivery door. Maybe the thieves were scared away before they could get it loaded."

"If you can arrange it," Stan urged, "search cars headed for the harbor and that are occupied by Japanese. Figure out some face-saving excuse."

"I'll have to," Edwards said, "I don't want any international mess in my lap. Can your car radio receive in our wave length?"

"Yes."

"Good. You're Special Investigator Number 7," Edwards said. "I'll keep you posted."

SPECIAL INVESTIGATOR NUMBER 7 knew of a bottleneck in the scheme of things and he drove to it. He parked near the intersection and watched the harbor-bound cars. Twenty minutes later an expensive sedan stopped as the red light flashed against it. Traffic on the intersecting street flowed. Stan glanced at the sedan's occupants. "Big time stuff," he reflected, "Hisako Kumata, the *Kamchatka's* chief officer, and Kamuri, the importer. A man would think twice before stopping them."

Everyone who had traveled on the *Kamchatka* knew Kumata's toothy smile, his hair-trigger laugh, and smart cracks in faultless English. Navy men knew from his bearing that he not only belonged to the Samurai class, but that he was a reserve officer in the Imperial Japanese navy.

"His manner makes the average American seem blundering and crude," Stan reflected, "but I've another picture of that fellow—the smile gone, an insolent face

revealing contempt for all things Occidental." The signal changed and Stan said, "Here goes."

He did a couple of things to attract attention. He turned around in the middle of the block and started following the Kamuri car. The red light went against him, but he boomed through anyway, knowing traffic hadn't really started to roll. He was quite aware a motorcycle officer and a police car observed this. The police car turned out of traffic and followed. The motorcycle officer got under way immediately.

Stan shot ahead and was doing sixty in a few moments. Through the rear vision mirror he saw the police bearing down. He passed the Kamuri car and slammed on the brakes without signaling. The crash nearly jerked his head off. As the cars, with locked bumpers and bent fenders stopped, the police car stopped ahead and the motorcycle alongside of Stan.

He got out. "I'm terribly sorry about this," he said, "but it is one of those things."

The prowl car policeman sniffed Stan's breath. "You been drinking?" he asked.

"Do we have to go into that?" Stan asked.

"Yes," the motorcycle officer said, "and we go into the business of turning around in the middle of the block and going against a red light, too."

"Let's take things in their order," Stan suggested. "First — the damage to the Japanese gentlemen."

Mr. Kamuri was smiling and forgiving. "Things like this happen," he said, sucking in his breath. He bowed. "Have no wish to prosecute."

Hisako Kumata turned on the smile reserved for wealthy ladies who traveled on his ship. It was very special. He echoed yes to everything Kamuri said. They were all for leaving cards and continuing.

"I wouldn't think of dodging a responsibility," Stan said. "Let's check on the damage. Your bumpers and front fender —ruined. One fender is riding the tire, in fact. He looked in the rear of the sedan. The cushion was on the floor and something seemed to have happened to the back cushions. Springs and covering had been torn loose. It looked as if a spent cannonball might have come through. "Or maybe a shell," Stan reflected. "Those things on the floor look like shells—about four and a half inches in diameter and twelve long. Still, kinda short for a shell. They couldn't be mercury flaws?"

He stepped around to the nearest policeman and showed a special detective's commission. "I'm John Stanley," he said. "Kumata's the man who killed the drugstore fellows. He's tough—"

As the policeman stepped toward Kumata the latter met him halfway. The smile was gone, the mask lowered, and he was the Samurai fighting his way from a trap. He caught the policeman's wrist and threw him over his back, then slammed him to the pavement. The importer was going for his gun, when his wrist snapped. A policeman had smashed his club across it. Stan hurled himself at Kumata and that worthy missed the hold he confidently expected to get. The next moment it looked as if his head might be twisted off his shoulders.

He was in that position when a billy club cracked down on his skull. "That takes care of everything," the motorcycle officer said. "I'll escort you to Headquarters—just in case."

"As soon as you load the men into the car," Stan said, "put the mercury aboard. That may be Exhibit A in this case."

The motorcycle officer grasped a flask, then looked up in amazement. "Holy smoke!" he exclaimed. "This stuff *is* heavy." He looked curiously at Stan, and there was admiration in his eyes. "Smart guy," he said softly, "you figured you had no right to search that car without a warrant, and that would take time. So you tricked him to slamming on the brake and the momentum of the flasks drove them

from the luggage compartment through the cushions and onto the floor."

"That's right," Stan answered. "There was a lot of weight concentrated in a small space. Something had to give."

CAPTAIN EDWARDS was on hand when they arrived at Headquarters. So was the fingerprint man. He took Kumata's fingerprints at once.

"You followed through beautifully on this, Stan," he said. "What was the tip-off?"

"The peculiar breaks in the bones of the murdered men suggested jujutsu — Japanese," Stan explained. "The known addicts knew nothing of the murders, which eliminated them. The fingerprints were not recorded in Washington which suggested either a recruit to criminal ranks, or a foreigner. I naturally thought of the *Kamchatka Maru,* but narcotics are cheap in the Orient and I couldn't figure why they would commit murder for the stuff in this country. I checked on the items drugstores carried that the Japanese needed, and when I came to mercury it was a simple matter to telephone and ask if mercury had been taken. It had."

"Then you learned the *Kamchatka* was due to sail tomorrow morning and you concluded there would be a wholesale haul made tonight?" Edwards suggested.

"It seemed logical," Stan said. "It would be their last chance. When I heard they had robbed Suddreth's it was a question of stopping them. I didn't have authority and there would have been hell to pay if I'd stopped two big shots like that pair and they were innocent, so I played a drunken driver's role."

"A swell out," Edwards agreed. "The theft of narcotics was a red herring dragged across the trail to confuse the police." He looked at the flasks. "Man! Man! They should pin a medal on you for this job. Think of the thousands of bombs and shells that *won't* be dropped on China, the Dutch possessions and maybe the U. S. A. for lack of fulminate of mercury."

---

# The Skunk

BY S. OMAR BARKER

THE skunk, *mephitis mesomelas,*
Is one of nature's strangest smellas.
Between skunk child and skunk adult
Distinkuishment is difficult,
For skunks of mountain, plain and prairie,
In size, though not in odor, vary.
The skunk is plainly not a cat.
It therefore seems improper that
We call the infant skunk a "kitten,"
And "pup" seems even more unfitten.
'Twould better tag his breed, I think,
To call the little stinker skink.
A skink, when met upon the trail,
Will turn his rear and hoist his tail—
A trick he knows from birth, for it's
His method of instinktive blitz.
Yet 'mid his fellows of the wildwood,
He plays as gaily as a child would,
All unaware of competitioning
With nature's sylvan air conditioning!

# Mr. Cinderella

By LAWRENCE TREAT

*Author of "A Matter of Scents," etc.*

***He Wanted All the Things He'd Never Had . . . to Be, for a Brief While, a Big Shot—No Matter What It Might Cost!***

ALL day long the big sedan had followed them, swimming along the wet roadbed like a giant fish. When they slowed up, it slowed up, too. When they pushed the little coupé to the limit, the dark shape speeded up and kept the same, even distance. Once they turned off into a side road and hid there, well out of sight. A half hour later, cruising along the highway, they found the sedan waiting patiently to pick them up.

Now, with dusk falling, they left the macadam to wallow like a baby tank in the mud of that country lane. Overhead, the rain beat down on the roof with the steady drumming of distant gunfire.

Ric shifted gears at the top of the hill and squinted into the mirror. "Still see it?" he asked.

Big Joe Madden burst another vest button as he hunched around to look. "Naah. Probably took a short cut. They'll be waiting when we get there."

"No short cut on the map," said Ric.

"Maps!" snorted Madden, who didn't believe in them.

They were a study in contrasts. Ric Doty, the fashion plate of the department, who never traveled without a map, just as he never went to a night club without a reservation. And Joe Madden, a gawky country boy in a rumpled, blue serge suit with the sleeves too short. He always took one step at a time. What was in his way, he knocked over; what wasn't there, didn't exist.

Those were the chief qualities that made them one of the best detective teams in the New York Police Department. Ric's style, Joe Madden's plodding realism.

"That dame of mine must have double-crossed us," observed Ric. "Told us where Elkins was, and then turned around and warned them we knew."

Madden yawned. When they got there, they'd find Elkins or they wouldn't. When they spoke to him, he'd agree or he wouldn't agree.

Ric had fifty reasons why Elkins would talk and another fifty why he wouldn't, and none of them made a damn bit of difference.

Madden slouched lower in the seat. "Guess I'll take me a nap, Ric. These long trips—always—" The sentence trailed off and he was asleep when Ric glanced at him.

Ric switched on some radio static and then switched it off. He was all nerves, worrying ahead of time and holding himself in. Joe always claimed Ric burnt himself out with worry. But worry was imagination and imagination had brought them here and was going to get them a pair of promotions.

Maybe.

Ric had to admit that Steeg's mob was still on its toes. He'd thought he was putting one over on them when he'd dug up the girl and wheedled out of her the dope on Elkins. She'd worked for Steeg, years ago, when Elkins had, and she knew where Elkins was and what he could tell. And it was plenty.

The Steeg trial was big potatoes. Organized blackmail, working with the efficiency of big business. The gang kept detailed files and never approached a victim unless they knew they could put him behind bars if he refused. And they never went after anybody unless they were sure he could pay fifty grand, minimum. It was the safest racket that a criminal gang had ever thought up, and it depended a hundred per cent on Steeg's organizing ability.

He had laughed when he'd been arrested in a Park Avenue apartment. He had friends all over town, in high places. He had dollars working for him everywhere, in battalions of a thousand and up. He was confident. Until he learnt that Mike Rosen had squealed.

Mike was the weak link in Steeg's chain. Mike, jealous and resenting the size of his split, wanted only one thing. To get even with Steeg and put him behind bars.

And then, when Rosen was apparently safe in custody, a little punk with a twisted mind and a thin, scrawny arm sunk a knife between Rosen's shoulder blades. Steeg had had no part in it, but, with Rosen's death, the case against Steeg had collapsed. And everybody knew it.

THE D.A. was playing for time. If he dropped the case now, the smell would blow him right out of office. He was waiting until something big happened in the world and crammed the front pages to the exclusion of everything else. Then the Steeg case would be nolle prossed, quietly and without fuss. It would just be one of those things that nobody would ever hear of again.

Then Ric had thought of the girl, and gone out and found her. Marie. He was good with women and he'd gotten what he wanted. He and Joe Madden had taken the information clear up to the commissioner and the D.A.

"Maybe you remember a little guy by the name of Herbert Elkins," Ric had said. "Worked for Steeg about five years ago. He was an accountant and an expert stenographer, and for a while he was in Steeg's confidence. Then something happened and Elkins quit. Nobody else knows where he is. He married his childhood sweetheart and they're running a little hotel, up in the mountains. And he can give us more on Steeg than this Rosen guy."

"How do you know he'll talk?" asked the commissioner.

Ric had shrugged. "Joe and me, we specialize in accountants."

The commissioner had snorted. "Anything on this Elkins, outside of his Steeg connections?"

"No."

"You realize, don't you, that he can stand on his constitutional right not to give testimony that will incriminate him? That even if you find him and he knows all you think he does, that we have no independent evidence, except what he can supply?"

"Sure. Want us to say we're licked, without even giving this a try?"

The commissioner had looked at the D.A. and the D.A. had looked at the commissioner. It was the D.A. who had said, "When can you start?"

"Tomorrow," said Ric.

Well, here they were.

The rain had let up and turned to a soft, misty drizzle. Ric skidded slowly into the driveway and stopped under the sign that read "Indian Arrow Inn." He poked at Joe.

"Come on, Farmer. Time to get up and milk the cows."

Joe Madden stretched and ripped another button on his vest. Then he pushed open the door of the car and stepped in a mud puddle.

They tramped into the old-fashioned room with a hotel desk at one side and a coal stove in the center and rocking chairs all over the place. Joe Madden, a big, ungainly guy with his wrists poking out of his sleeves and his blunt, homely features looking friendly and bewildered at the same time. And Ric Doty, dark-eyed, smart and nervous and energetic, chesty, with small, tight features, and wearing a trench coat with the collar turned up, and with his hat tilted at just the right angle.

A sharp-faced woman with a blotchy complexion shrieked at them. "Mind you don't go dragging mud in here. Takes me all morning to clean up, just because somebody don't bother to wipe his feet off on the mat. You want a room?"

Ric smiled and Madden gawked and said "Ma'am, I wouldn't dirty up a nice clean parlor like this. Wiped my shoes off with my handkerchief." He lifted the foot that hadn't sunk into the mud puddle. His other shoe tracked up the carpet and left the trail of a one-legged man.

The woman stared at the clean shoe and wondered how she'd been tricked. Ric said, "We'll take a couple of rooms, thanks. And some dinner, if you got any."

"Dinner's through," she said. She seemed to have a grudge against the whole world and she was ready to take it out on anybody that came along. "The gall of folks, coming in past seven and expecting me to slave over their victuals. Herbert!" She raised her shrill voice. "Herbert!"

A MEEK little man trotted through a door at the far end of the room. "Get these gentlemen's bags," she told him, "and bring them up to the corner room. And that'll be a dollar apiece. And extra if you want food."

"I could eat a bite, Ma'am," said Madden. He stared thoughtfully at little Herbert Elkins and his wife. Childhood sweethearts could sure grow up funny.

Doty and Madden stoked on eggs and thick slabs of ham, and then they collared Elkins in a corner of the big room and told him what they wanted.

"You won't be touched," said Ric. "You'll keep out of town until the day of the trial, and then you'll walk into court

and give your testimony, and you can live the rest of your life with a clear conscience."

"What if Steeg hears about it?" asked Elkins anxiously.

Madden grinned. "We'll take care of that."

"They got Rosen, even in jail."

"Steeg had nothing to do with it. That's just newspaper talk."

"Somebody did it." Elkins' mild blue eyes blinked anxiously. "And if Steeg heard, he'd kill me. He never did like me. I—" Elkins broke off and stared at the door. Slowly, Doty and Madden turned around and watched the two men who had entered.

They knew now who'd been in the big sedan that had followed them. Steeg's boys. Cowboy Lang, with the big, ten-gallon hat that he always wore, and Butch Harris, whose very face was swollen up with muscle.

They walked quietly toward the trio in the corner. Ric and Joe Madden stood up, but little Elkins cowered back in his chair and lifted a hand as if to protect himself.

Lang said, "Hello, Elkins."

Elkins didn't answer. His face was ash-colored and he licked his lips with a dry tongue.

Madden said, "What do you guys want?"

Harris sidled past him and stared down at Elkins. "You wouldn't be thinking of ratting on Steeg, would you?" The Butcher grinned insolently. "Naah!" he growled. "You wouldn't. Not after what happened to Rosen."

Madden's hands shot forward suddenly and grabbed Harris by the wrist. He twisted it behind Harris' back, grabbed the collar and leaned. The big fellow arched his back helplessly, to ease the strain on his arm. Joe trotted him to the door, kicked it open and shoved. He came back rubbing his hands.

Cowboy Lang turned slowly and headed for the door. Just before he went out, he turned and said to Elkins, "So long—Rosen."

Elkins coughed nervously. Madden said, "Those guys talk too much. You were saying, Elkins?"

But Mrs. Elkins charged across the room. "Herbert!" she shrilled. "Don't listen to these men! You don't have to talk to them—they can't make you and you know it!"

Ric signaled to his sidekick that he'd take care of the lady and Joe should smooth down the little guy. Then Ric noticed Elkins and had a sudden idea. Instead of diverting Mrs. Elkins, Ric winked solemnly and watched the little man get bawled out.

Joe was sore about it later on, when they were up in their room. "The old loud-speaker!" he exclaimed. "She blows like a bellows and wheezes like a busted whistle, but she's married to this little rabbit and she wears the pants. You should have took her out in back and handed her the line, like she was a lady. Geez, Ric—you got to earn your salary sometimes. You can't expect 'em all to be beautiful."

Ric shrugged. "Sew some buttons on your vest, Joe, and quit worrying."

"Ric, I don't get sore easy. But when you won't even play up to the old noise-machine just because she's got a face like a faucet, and so the Steeg case goes up in smoke—geez! It ain't like you."

"I got a new angle."

"Ric, if you'd got her out of the way so I could quiet down this little guy, we might have swung it. But now—we're through."

Then the knock sounded on the door. Three soft little pats, and a whispering sound. Joe said, "Come on in."

It was Elkins.

He tiptoed across the floor and put his finger to his lips. "My wife," he whispered. "I wouldn't want her to know I was in here, talking to you. She might get angry."

"Sit down," said Ric.

"You see how it is, don't you?" asked

Elkins. "Even Steeg was afraid of her. What she'd do and what she'd say."

"So that's why he let you go!" exclaimed Ric.

Elkins nodded and said "Shh! She might hear. I want to get away from here. I'm scared of Steeg, and I'm scared of Harris and Lang. Sure. But I'm more scared of her, and I want to get away."

Ric smiled. That was the way he'd figured it. Let her crack down on Elkins, and she'd stampede him right into their

hands. Elkins would play ball for only one reason. To free himself from his wife.

"You'll get away all right," said Ric. "We can pull out now. I'll wire the D.A. and we'll meet him tomorrow and go over the case, and then we'll find a safe place where Steeg's gang can't touch you. And she won't even know where you are."

ELKINS shook his head. "That isn't what I want, to be cooped up somewhere or kept in protective custody. I want all the things I've never had."

"Sure," murmured Ric.

"I want to live!" whispered Elkins. "I want to be a big shot, just for a little while, and then I'll do anything you ask. I want to be the way Steeg was once, and I want him to hear about it. I want to go to the same hotel in Florida where he used to go, and I want to have pretty girls at my table and a write-up in the paper. I want people to point me out and think I'm rich and to walk across the lobby and say, 'Are you Mr. Elkins? I know you, but you don't know me.' I want to be all the things *she* said I never could be. I want to show her I'm as good as Steeg!"

Madden made a face, but Ric Doty's voice was soft and sympathetic. "You want to be Cinderella, huh? A big time, and then back to your kitchen."

Elkins smiled pathetically. "You could put it that way, I guess. Except that I'm not going back to the kitchen. And—I'm scared of Steeg's men."

Joe Madden grinned. "We'll take care of them. Like tonight. Throw them out as fast as they come. That's what we get paid to do."

"I have money, too, hidden in the cellar. Five thousand dollars that she doesn't know about, and I want to spend it. All!"

Ric dropped a hand on Elkins' narrow shoulder. "Mr. Cinderella, you're going to have a bigger time than you ever even dreamed about."

But it didn't work out that way. They sneaked off long before dawn and took a circuitous route back to the city, so that the big sedan wouldn't catch up and send them careening off the road. They met the D.A. in a small hotel and he checked over Elkins' evidence and found that it would do.

Then they began the long trip south, and the nightmare started. Every time a car crept up on them, little Elkins drew in his breath and his mouth went tight. Steeg's men. Every time they stopped at a hotel, Elkins double-locked the door and barricaded it with a chair. Steeg's men. Every time he entered a restaurant, he cowered behind big Joe Madden and stared at the tables. Steeg's men. Ric began to dream about little Elkins passing out from heart failure and never living to reach the witness chair in a New York courtroom.

Elkins wouldn't go out at night, and the three of them spent their evenings playing casino. To cheer him up, Ric and Madden stacked the cards and dealt off the bottom and gave the little man all the winning hands. It cost them money, too. A dollar or two every night. But even that didn't steady him.

Down in Miami, they took a suite at one

of the big hotels. Ric gathered in the women in threes. Joe made a precautionary trip to Police Headquarters and explained it all.

"Steeg's men'll be swarming down here pretty soon," he said. "You don't want a murder. You don't want this little dimwit's brains slopped all over the lobby of the best hotel you got, do you?"

"So what?"

"So you'll turn Lang and Harris around when they hit the state line, and you'll bounce any hood we tell you to. We'll spot 'em, me and Doty, and you'll grab 'em and wrap 'em up and send 'em back north, no matter who they are or how many night clubs or ponies they own. You'll crack down on 'em, hard."

"You know how it is. Steeg has a lot of friends."

"Had," said Joe Madden. And that was the argument that won his point.

Elkins never even saw the Steeg gunmen that the two detectives fingered and had hustled out of the state. He didn't know about the scrap Joe Madden had in the hotel corridor one night and he never found out about the cute little blonde who sat next to him at a night club party and disappeared so suddenly after dancing with Ric.

That was about the closest shave they had. Ric noticed the bulge in her handbag and the nervous way in which she looked around. He asked her to dance, and then dragged her out into the lobby and spat questions. He took her gun and he had to get rough, which he didn't like. But she broke down and told about the ambush outside the night club, and the Miami police did the rest, quietly and without fuss.

For the most part, Joe and Ric and little Elkins were safe because they always traveled in crowds and stayed in public places. Their safety lay in their notoriety. They made it a rule to do everything on the spur of the moment and never to join a party that had been planned in advance.

Nevertheless, Elkins languished. He was so scared that he developed a kind of palsy and couldn't shave himself. He sensed all the dangers he didn't know about, and a lot more that never existed. He developed indigestion and was scared to take any medicine for fear it would be poisoned. Ric got worried that the little guy would waste away to nothing. As for Madden, he ate hearty and took things as they came along, and he gained a pound for every one that Elkins lost.

BUT Ric was nearer right. One afternoon they were lounging in their room. Ric looked drowsy, with his black eyes lidded as if he were falling asleep over his book. Only the quick blinking of his lids showed the tension he really felt. Joe Madden, bursting out of his blue serge suit, dwarfed his arm chair and looked uncomfortable and unworried.

Elkins got up and walked casually to the window. It was on the eighth floor. He gave a quick, apprehensive look behind him and leaned out. His muscles bunched as he tried to work up the nerve to jump.

But Ric saw. He snapped to his feet and reached the window in two bounds. By the time he was there, however, he looked leisurely again.

"Sort of drafty," he remarked, and quietly closed the window. And locked it.

Elkins went back to the desk, picked up some writing paper and opened his fountain pen. Presently he crumpled up the sheet of paper and flung it into the trash basket. Ric and Joe exchanged a glance. Elkins bent down, put his pen in his mouth and reached for another piece of paper.

"It's the uncertainty!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Not knowing when or how. And after the trial, when you quit, then what?"

"Then Steeg'll be in jail," remarked Ric, "and you'll go back to your hotel."

Little Elkins looked up with a pleading, anxious expression. His lips trembled but he didn't speak. Ric went back to his

book. Steeg would get the little guy afterwards, if he really wanted to.

Just before dinner, when Madden fished the crumpled paper out of the basket, he found nothing but the date lines. Nevertheless, something was happening.

It kept happening for a couple of days. Then Elkins bought a stamp, and a few hours later he suddenly perked up. Strangely, after that, he was happier and the danger of suicide seemed definitely past.

Ric wasn't sure until the following morning, when he had one of his rare interviews alone with Madden.

"He must have written that letter, Joe. He might have managed it in the bathroom."

Madden nodded. "He did. And slipped it to a bellhop to mail. I checked up on that."

"Who'd he write to?"

Joe shrugged. "Bellhop didn't notice."

"I wish I knew."

"Why worry? He got something off his mind, Ric. What's the difference what?"

The what made a big difference to Ric, and none whatsoever to Madden. And Ric had to admit that Madden was the wiser of the two. Their job was the simple one of keeping Elkins alive and therefore the letter, whatever it contained, could hardly matter. Because even a little rabbit of a man couldn't get bumped off by U. S. mail.

Ric and Madden had nothing to do with the preparations up at the New York end. They merely waited at their Florida hotel, read about the opening of the Steeg trial, the picking of the jury and the preliminary skirmishes. Then came a wire from the D.A. telling them to take a plane to New York, where they'd be met and the responsibility would no longer be theirs.

Ric opened his eyes the morning of the trip and saw exactly what he'd seen every other morning. The big hulk of Joe Madden humping the bedclothes like a mountain range. And over in the corner furthest from the window, the figure of Elkins.

Ric yawned. Elkins chirped, "What time is it?" and Ric said, "Time to get up."

Two hours later, Ric was caressing the butt of the gun and examining the other passengers in the plane. An elderly couple, a few business men flying back

from their Florida vacation, an assortment that looked as if they'd faint at the sight of a loaded gun. Steeg's long arm hadn't planted anybody here.

Nevertheless, Ric kept his hand close to his revolver. He had imagination, and he didn't want to see a middle-aged spinster throw off a wig and plug Elkins.

RIC still couldn't believe it when the plane landed and Captain Murphy, from Headquarters, shook hands and explained that he had a police cavalcade waiting to take them to the courtroom. A couple of motorcycle cops, then a radio car, then the sedan with the three from Florida and then another radio car. Steeg's gunmen could never tackle an army like that.

Ric glanced at Elkins. The little guy had been air-sick and he wasn't in the pink of condition. But he had both arms and both legs, and no bullet holes. Ric figured it was a pretty good job, considering. He hooked his arm in Elkins' and said, "Come on." Elkins tottered, and Madden hooked his other arm.

Ric swore softly. It would be just like

the little guy to pass out or go nuts or something. Elkins' feet dragged and he kept muttering to himself and he seemed to have lost his sense of balance. Ric and Madden flung him into the rear seat and ranged themselves on either side of him.

"What's the matter?" demanded Madden.

Elkins shook his head and his lips jabbered without making a sound. Ric rubbed his palms together. Maybe a slap in the face would bring the little guy around. His brain had passed out and the two detectives might as well deliver a straw scarecrow as a runt with a paralyzed tongue.

Ric pushed Elkins further down in the seat. Elkins glanced up with an expression of fright so intense that he was liable to get a stroke.

"I can't do it!" he whispered. "I can't think. I can't remember anything at all!"

Madden said, "Nuts!" and Ric muttered, "You lousy little fraud! Playing along with Steeg all the time, huh? Pretending you were ready to talk, and figuring you'd rat on us when the time came around. Just a stooge. Whose idea was it, anyhow? The wife's?"

Madden thought it was Ric who was going nuts, but little Elkins turned and said, "My wife? She had nothing to do with it. I'm scared—that's all. Steeg'll kill me. He'll never let me get to court. And if he does, he'll shoot me on the witness stand. And if that doesn't happen, somebody'll get me as soon as you two leave me."

Ric laughed sharply. "Listen," he said. "I've had enough of you. For a month you been making monkeys out of Joe and me. Said you had dough before we started out. Well, what the hell happened to it? We paid for all the trimmings. All the drinks and the parties and the cars. You little tightwad—you been chiseling on us right along. And when we play cards, you gyp us with that trick deck you got and—"

"Me cheat?" exclaimed Elkins. He was red in the face and getting mad.

"Sure. How else could you win every night? Geez! Tell me—you ever lose a hand to Joe and me?"

"That's a good one!" cried Elkins. "Me, cheating! Why, I saw you slip a card in lots of times. I was going to object, but then you did it so badly and you lost anyhow, and after awhile I got used to it."

"Joe," said Ric. "You saw him, didn't you? I don't mind losing a couple of bucks when it's part of a job and I got to live with the guy that does it, but the job's finished now. So I'm dishing it out straight."

Elkins argued it all the way to the courthouse. He was still arguing as they stepped out of the car, and that was why the reporters described him as an aggressive little man who was sore at the detectives who'd guarded him and who carried a chip on his shoulders throughout the whole day he was testifying. He snapped at the judge and barked at the D.A. But most of his venom he kept for Steeg and the lawyer who represented him.

Joe and Ric left the courthouse long before Elkins stepped off the stand. They had a quiet beer in a booth of a nearby bar. Ric was grinning his head off and Madden heaved a deep sigh and lifted his glass.

"No more nursemaid stuff, Ric. Let's have a drink on that. And to the little rabbit that finally got sore and forgot how scared he was."

Ric laughed quietly. "He'd stored it up too many years, Joe. Steeg bullied him first, and then when he left Steeg, that wife of his took up. The little guy hadn't had the spunk to open his trap in years, so when I told him he was a crook, he blew up. Because whatever else he was, he was honest. Probably didn't even know Steeg was crooked until after he got the job."

Madden emptied his beer mug in one long gulp. "It's funny how a guy can be different from what everybody thought he was. Little Elkins, blowing up when he

got sore. And Steeg, blowing up when he was on the spot. Everybody thought he was big stuff, and all he did was hire a couple of cheap hoods and send 'em to Florida. And when we chased 'em off, Steeg just folded up and took his medicine."

Ric nodded. "What worries me, Joe, is what the rabbit does now. He had his big inning today. Does he go back to that wife of his, just like before?"

"Why not? When he stops getting mad, he'll get scared all over again. He'll see a Steeg mobster in every bum on the street, and a Steeg bomb every time somebody sends him a Christmas present."

Ric took a roll of bills out of his pocket and began dividing it in half. "Forty, Joe. I hooked it out of the rabbit's pants yesterday morning to get back what we gave him at casino. He had over five grand when we started out for Florida and he only spent a few hundred on his hotel. What happened to the rest of it?"

Joe Madden shrugged. He didn't know and he couldn't guess, and so it didn't bother him.

BUT it bothered Ric. Vaguely, he sensed that it had something to do with the letter Elkins had written. And when, hours later, the extra hit the streets with the news that little Herbert Elkins had walked out of the courthouse by himself, turned a corner and gotten a bullet squarely between the eyes, Ric had a sudden flash of insight.

He knew then where the letter and the four grand had gone. Elkins had simply been unable to face the years ahead, married to a shrew and threatened by the Steeg mob. And so, to do away with the terrible tension of waiting, he'd made it certain and hired a gunman to kill him. Because, whatever else, he could neither escape his wife nor return to the slavery she represented.

To Ric, who had imagination, it was as clear and simple as that. As for Madden, he never gave it a thought. It wasn't his case.

**In our next issue**

*Liberty is a very expensive commodity!*

**FOG BELOW**

*An up to the minute adventure by*

**Frederick C. Painton**

**SHORT STORIES for Feb. 10th**

*This Lone Wolf Stuff Was Hard on a Man; Got His Nerves All on Edge*

# THE RED POOL

By JAY LUCAS

FARO ED was on the dodge; this time, he had to run right! Posters out all over California for him. Rewards. Posses searching the hills for him back there. But now, as always, he'd been too clever for them, and here he was in Arizona Territory where a man was safe. Ed Wykerly —Faro Ed—was very clever, and he knew it.

He sat his good horse on top of a ridge and watched the road in both directions. The thing was that this horse had been pretty hard ridden and he wanted a fresh one. He knew how to get one; the same way he'd got this bay. Not that he really wanted to kill anybody, but he was clever enough to know that there was only one absolutely safe way to get a mount. Sure; if he hadn't done things that way, he probably would not be over here now; and even if he were, the word would have got ahead and they'd be looking for him. Too bad what one had to do sometimes. Faro Ed always admitted that he was almost too tenderhearted—when people would let him be that way.

Ed, among his many other great virtues, had the patience of an Apache. He'd been up here nearly three hours, and he was prepared to spend the rest of the day here if he had to. Riders had passed several times, but they didn't suit; either their horses didn't strike his critical eye, or they'd be in groups. A pair of cowboys had passed, well mounted, but generally speaking he didn't want any dealings with cowboys; they were a hair-brained crowd, and would shoot at the drop of the hat—if they waited for it to drop.

Sitting here, he was thinking that he had made a mistake. Which, of course, the best of men do, so he could hardly blame himself. He really could have got by without shooting that young teller in the bank, or by shooting him through the arm, but it always made him mad when somebody tried to draw on him. It was entirely too bad that he had such a dirty temper, but that is one of the things a man just can't help. And then that woman had gone and squealed on him—he should never have got to fooling with Jim Crewe's wife in the first place, even if she was a pretty, black-headed little thing; she had no sense. He wondered vaguely if Jim would take her back now; he doubted it, knowing Jim as well as he did. Of course

everything would have worked out all right but for that Vigilante business over around Frisco; they certainly were kicking up a rumpus; why, they'd even strung up Shasta Tony, one of Ed's best friends. But Tony had never been smart, like Ed.

Ed's keen brown eyes were watching a little cloud of dust swinging toward him. A single rider, as he had long ago seen. A long-legged sorrel, covering ground at an amazing pace for a running walk, and seeming to do it with no effort whatever. Looked like a real horse! A cowboy riding him, judging by the easy, slouching seat and what he could make out of the clothes. Well, might as well size him up. Ed waited until he was almost opposite, and rode slowly from the stunted cedars.

"Howdy, pardner," he greeted, friendly.

"Howdy." A good natured, humorous Texas drawl.

Only a kid; couldn't be much over twenty. Pretty green looking, with his broad face and his grin. Curly blond hair. Yes, very innocent and green.

SURE he was! Buddy Kelso had early learned that it pays to look one straight in the eye at all times; there is a queer notion, which all crooks know, that anybody who does so is supposed to be honest. And one would be a fool not to capitalize on a broad, innocent grin when it is so easy to do it. He and Billy the Kid had made a beautiful pair, during their short partnership down around Lordsburg; two cherubs riding along, whom even the worst curmudgeon would not suspect of any evil thoughts. They'd pulled some neat little tricks, but they'd had some minor disagreements, and the trouble was that you never knew when the smiling Kid was going to shoot you—and it was inadvisable to try to shoot him; he seemed to have eyes in the back of his head.

"I've been resting my horse in the shade," remarked Faro Ed. "How far is it to Cedar Fork, can you tell me?"

" 'Bout fo'teen miles, I reckon."

The young fellow seemed glad of company; he swung in beside the other and offered him the makings. He had a slightly respectful air; perhaps it was because of Ed's good clothes and heavy gold watch chain—Ed looked prosperous, besides being older.

"Know this country around here?"

"No—jest driftin' through."

And so he or his horse wouldn't be missed.

"I'm a stranger around here, too—California. My name's Ed O'Neill. I deal stud."

"Thought you looked like something that way," said the young fellow respectfully. "Me, all I know is to sight over an ol' cow's backbone when I can get a job doin' that. Ain't been able to get that lately; I'm ridin' chuck line."

"Going to Cedar Fork?"

"Naw. Turnin' off pretty quick; I heard of an outfit south of here where I might ketch on ridin' rough string."

Ed did not remark on this; he was doing a little methodical planning and thinking. That was where so many fellows went wrong; not thinking things out beforehand. They had gone perhaps half a mile when Ed saw dust far ahead on the road. A good sized dust; must be either a stage or several horsemen. Whichever it was, Ed did not want to meet it. But the young Texan spoke before he did.

"Well, pardner, reckon I'll be turnin' off here. If I got it straight, the Y Cross must be somewhere near that red butte 'way off there south. Hope I have got it right; I hate lyin' out all night."

They had stopped for the moment. Ed spoke suddenly.

"Pardner, I'll tell you the truth; I'm pretty low on funds myself—that's a stud-dealer's life; rich one day, broke the next. Suppose they'd put me up at that ranch for the night?"

The Texan looked at Ed's fine gold watch chain—and if that wasn't a real diamond in his tie, it sure would pass for

one. Ed saw the glance and spoke again.

"Oh, I've a few things, but I don't want to sell or pawn 'em unless I have to. Sort of keepsakes. Do you suppose they'd—"

Buddy Kelso grinned—or grinned a little more widely.

"Heck, yes! Anybody's welcome on a cow outfit. Come on, pardner!"

They struck in through the stunted cedars. Both of them looked slightly absent. Once the cowboy whistled a few bars of *The Lone Prairee;* he whistled very badly and out of tune. Ed's eyes were sweeping around as though seeking some certain spot, or kind of spot. A mile or so from the road, he stopped his horse.

"Little canyon. We have to go 'round it."

"Shore funny country here; you don't know what you'll run into next." And he added carelessly, "Let's get down an' look into it."

Just like a kid, wanting to go around peering into things. But Ed had been about to make the same suggestion.

"Sure!" he agreed.

They swung off slowly and let their reins drag. Ed nodded carelessly at the sorrel.

"Say, that's a real horse you got. Bring him from Texas?"

"Uh-huh. That's old Dave Smith's brand, in the Big Bend—south o' Marfa."

"Oh, you're from the Big Bend. Tough country; I've seen some tough hombres from there."

"Well, she ain't curried below the knees much." A laugh. "There's an onderstandin' that when a feller gits across the Pecos an' in there, he ain't to be followed by the law. But you'll find a few honest fellers in there—there was me an' two more." The young cowboy laughed at his own joke; he seemed to think it very witty.

They had by now reached the edge of the narrow chasm. It was hardly so much a canyon as a great, deep crack in the red rock that lay all about in a solid sheet; one wondered how those few scrubby cedars ever found foothold.

"She's sho' deep! Say, see that little waterhole 'way down there, straight under us? Sho' looks a long way down! Bet it does no good; cattle or nothin' could git down to it."

They leaned over the edge, peering at that dismal looking, reddish pool so far below. A single gnarled, stunted cedar grew on its edge, partly overhanging it. For some reason, the red pool looked evil, cut off as it was from mankind by those two red cliffs.

It was one of those very still, clear Arizona days when sounds carry far. Ed could hear wheels going past on the road a mile off, could just hear them by listening—a stage, all right. He straightened up and turned quickly, as though going to make some remark. He saw the young Texan with something in his hand; a slight, quick flush came to the young fellow's face.

"Uh—see this! I hear this is minin' country around here. What if we found a gold mine?"

He held out the big, jagged piece of rock, shiny and pretty but nothing more than common quartz. Mentally only, Ed's lips curled with contempt. Wasn't that just like a fool kid! See a shiny stone and think he'd found a gold mine. But Ed pretended interest.

"Say, maybe you got something good! And there's a bigger piece right behind you."

The young cowboy turned. That was when Ed shot him. He knew that the sound would carry to the road, but it would not be heard above the noise of the wheels. The young Texan just fell out on his face as he was stooping, and lay with arms sprawled, never moving.

THERE wasn't a chance in a thousand that anybody would see blood on the rocks here, but Ed was careful. He was always careful, and that was why he couldn't be caught; he took no chances

whatever. As he had planned ahead, he ran quickly forward, seized a wrist, and slid the body across the smooth rock. A push, and a limp thing was going sailing down, down beside the cliff. It struck once, and bounded out. It was turning over and over, slowly. He could faintly hear the crash as it tore through the branches of that gnarled cedar, and he could see the splash.

For a moment or two, the red waters of the little pool were disturbed, and then they closed, smoothed over.

Ed took a deep, nervous breath and then glanced around. For some reason, this sort of thing always made him nervous and jumpy for perhaps as much as two days. But he kept himself cool and methodical as he scooped up sand in his hands and threw it over that place on the rock; there was that chance in a thousand that somebody would come past here. He threw saddle and blankets and bridle down there, and put his own saddle on the fine sorrel. He would like to get the bay down there too, but he snorted and reared and would not lead up to the edge, so he turned him loose. He would immediately start drifting back to his home range, and in such a thinly settled country nobody would notice him on the way.

Faro Ed mounted the sorrel, and before he had gone twenty yards a thrill of satisfaction was coming over him. This was a *horse!* That running walk was as fast as a lope, and felt like sitting in a rocking chair; a man could ride him all day and not feel tired. He sure wished he hadn't had to get him the way he had—that poor dumb, green kid! But the world was full of dumb, green kids, who never amounted to anything, because they didn't have enough brains to count. Worked hard all their lives for twenty or thirty a month, and died in the poorhouse. When you came right down to it, they counted for little more than mules hitched to a plough; they were hardly to be regarded as human. Only a fool worked all his life! But he wished there had been any other safe way to do it, which there wasn't.

Faro Ed was damned sick and tired of this lone-wolf stuff, hiding from people, sleeping out nights; he had been doing it only because it was necessary, until he had come this good distance. What he really liked was the bright lights and—girls. And the girls liked him too, and he knew it; he was handsome, in that dark way they admired. It was mainly girls of a certain kind that lost their heads about him, but he didn't recognize that; he hadn't associated much with the other kind. Of course there had been little Myra Crewe, Jim's wife, but she was pretty green until he had taught her things. Taught her too much, the little devil—she had squealed on him! Yes, this lone-wolf stuff was no good for a man; got his nerves on edge.

The devil! Wasn't he safe over here? Word about him couldn't have reached all this far, and even if it had, people in Arizona Territory were not lying awake nights worrying about other people's business. If they were told that he'd killed a man in a stickup over in California, they'd only shrug and ask what of it? No; when they found that he had in his pockets every red cent from that holdup, they'd start to be nice to him. Yes, he'd go into that town of Cedar Fork. From the name of it, it was a safe guess that nobody there would have brains enough to pour sand out of a boot, which would suit him all right.

A few yards from the road, he dismounted and seated himself comfortably with his back against a cedar. Here he drew out a slightly soiled piece of paper and a stub of pencil. He wrote slowly and painstakingly, with his left hand—though he was normally right handed. He held the product back and gazed at it with half-closed eyes, like an artist surveying his work; he was an artist in his way. That was a good-enough bill of sale for anybody, and nobody could recognize the shaky scrawl as his own writing. It was signed Charlie Norton, and it gave, for good

consideration, all rights to a certain sorrel gelding. Ed nodded with satisfaction at the paper. Not everybody would be smart enough to have this all ready, in case anything came up.

It was a little after sunset when he rode into the miserable street of Cedar Fork; there was only the one street, with a few shacks scattered beside it among the cactus. Behind him, the western sky was a wonderful blaze of color above the blue Sierra Azul, but he could not waste his time on that—women liked such stuff. He saw a livery stable sign and turned in at the wide door. He spoke from his saddle.

"Can I put my horse up here for the night?"

A fat old man got up very slowly from a heavy, homemade easy chair, and stood looking him over slowly and sleepily. He did not waste a second on the brand on the horse.

"Shore," he grunted wheezily. "That's what we're in business fur. Want me to unsaddle him for you?"

His tone said that he was hoping not, and wanted to get back to his chair and his corncob pipe. Ed spoke kindly.

"Thanks, Dad; I'll tend to him myself."

"Put him in that stall; they's hay in it already. You'll find oats in that big box." And he added, "Not a bad nag you got."

"Uh-huh; Reddy's all right! I raised him from a colt, and that brand belongs to my uncle, in California. Blazes, is this the best oats you got! Oh, well!"

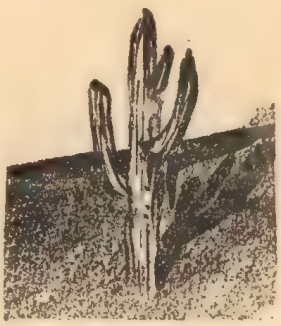
Walking out to the street, the horse attended to, he stopped. Old Dad looked up and took the pipe from his mouth. He seemed to think it would take too much effort to speak.

"My name's Ed Hankins. Know of anywhere I might catch on dealing stud?" He'd stick to that yarn. Better not let people begin to speculate about him.

"Uh—might see Mike Ballinger, at the Roundup Saloon. His dealer got hisself shot yesterday."

Ed grinned at the casualness of the statement. It told more than books of what this part of Arizona Territory was like. He thought he'd like it here. He strolled down the broken board sidewalk, carrying a little bundle that had ridden behind his saddle—clean shirt, a tie or two, and a few things like that. He found the one barber shop in town, and strolled in.

"Yo're next, pardner."



He sat down, and gave friendly but careful instructions as to his hair and mustache; he was very particular about them. To his surprise, this hick barber did a good job; when he had changed his shirt and tie, he surveyed himself with admiration in the cracked mirror.

"Shoe-shine around?"

"That blame kid lit out somewhere—likely over at the Roundup watchin' a game. You jest can't depend on Mexicans! There's the shine outfit, if you want to give 'em a lick yoreself."

He did, more than a lick; he put a very good polish on them. And he brushed his clothes; by this time the barber had become friendly enough to help knock the dust from his back in a brotherly way. He was telling a story about a friend of his who used to deal monte in Prescott—of course he had found out Ed's business long before this.

It was dark when he entered the Roundup, but, for kerosene lamps, the place was highly lighted up. He paused in the doorway and licked his lips. Now, *this* was what he wanted!

"Hello, handsome! Looking for me?"

He grinned down at the girl, but his

eyes strayed off to survey the other girls in the room. He shook his head.

"Not you, sister. Say, that little red-head don't look bad to me—can she dance well?"

This first one gave him a dirty look and, laughing, he walked down the room to the other. He swore softly to himself as he saw a young miner reaching her before him, but he caught her eye—she seemed to be waiting for that. He jerked his head. She was turning from the young miner and coming to meet him.

"Here you air—you kip me waitin'!"

Pretty clever; no use in getting into a row with that young miner.

"You'll do, sister!" He grinned at her happily, and they went to a table. She leaned across.

"I loaf ze dark man, like you!"

Faro Ed's eyes glistened happily.

"Frenchy, ain't you?" She was a pretty little devil, vivacious. If she hadn't gone and done a rotten job of dying her hair red, she'd have been still prettier. But she'd do, she'd do!

"*Oui!* You dreenk—w'at?"

"Bubble water, with you, kid!"

She looked impressed, as he had meant; she had caught a spender. And she said what he expected.

"Ze champaigne we not 'ave. Vairy good w'iskey."

"Oh, well! That'll do." He looked as though he was not used to such cheap stuff.

"I go ordair eet."

She jumped up and ran to the bar. They didn't do that in California; there, the bartender came to the table. This bartender, a sullen looking Irishman, kept on wiping a glass morosely as she leaned across the bar and spoke to him in a low voice. Telling him, no doubt, that the liquor had to be the very best. She turned away, laughing, and still he kept on wiping the glass.

But presently the drinks came. His expert eye judged the girl's to be cold tea—for which he would have to pay at least four bits. But what the hell! Those girls had to make a living, and they couldn't drink all the time. She was chattering away in that lively way that only Frenchies have, with her bright black eyes dancing to his and away again. She was good at it! If he hadn't been clever, he'd have thought she meant it. Or maybe she did mean some of it; maybe she was falling for him. It was always more fun when they did. The little fools! He heard an authoritative voice with a Texas drawl:

"Let's go, boys! We gotta git that herd started before daylight in the mornin'. We gotta roll in!"

The speaker went out, with his swaying, stiff cowboy walk, and seven or eight big-hatted men followed him. What a life cowboys had, going to bed at this early hour, and getting up before the chickens had let out their first peep. Ed thought that he might have felt sorry for them only that he had no sympathy for fools.

"I like you—you air 'andsome man. You mebbe like me?"

Oh, how the little French devil could say it, in that innocent way! Ed laughed; this was a game he loved. He looked into the bright black eyes opposite. Well, this would be a game really worth playing, to make this wise little Frenchy fall for him—really fall. Sure pretty!

"Sure do, sister. Say, my name's Edwin." That sounded better than Edward.

"I am Anette." A pause, while they tasted their drinks.

"W'at you do? You no working man?"

He laughed scornfully. Say, why not stick around this town awhile; might as well be here as anywhere else. He could have fun with Anette.

"I deal stud. Don't want to brag, but I'm pretty good at it. Think I might be able to catch on here?" He was pretty good at it, as a matter of fact—good enough, he thought, for this shabby little town.

"Oh, that ees spleen-deed! Then you stay here. I see Mike about eet." She jumped up clapping her hands delightedly.

"Say, where's everybody gone to?" The saloon was deserted; the bartender was just strolling absently into the back room.

"Gone to? Oh—home. Beesness ees dull lately; veree dull." She shrugged and smiled down on him. "Mike, he in his room. I bring him here." She went tripping gaily out of the room on her high red heels.

FOR a moment Faro Ed sat there, smiling to himself. And suddenly, like a bucket of water thrown over him, a chill darted down his back and he sprang to his feet. Why, he was alone in the room! Might be all right, but— A grim, drawling voice came through the open window:

"Reach for the ceiling, Buddy! We got you."

The big, heavy safe! If he could get behind it! He flung himself across the room, jerking his gun from its shoulder holster. He pitched forward on his face, and dragged himself hurriedly the last six feet; there was a stream of blood on the floor behind him. His leg; they'd got him through the leg. He began to fire quickly. There came tinkles of glass, and one lamp after the other went out until the place was in thick darkness. Blood, wet and sticky, was running down his side now; they'd got him in the left side too, under the arm. He was panting, wedged into that little space between the safe and the wall.

That calm drawl came again—they did seem to take a thing coolly in Cedar Fork! "Hold the shooting a minute, boys!"

Silence, and darkness.

"Better come out and give up; we got you cornered."

"T'hell with you!" A snarl.

"Well, don't! We're all 'round the place, an' we can wait till daylight to get you." And, still more casually, "Don't shoot any more, boys. No use wreckin' Mike's place."

That dirty, treacherous little Frenchie! She had seen some poster of him, and she had recognized him. All she wanted was the reward. That time she had gone across and whispered to the bartender. The cowboys all leaving together—they'd be out there now.

He swallowed; he held his breath and listened. There was a very faint rustle and murmur from all around the building; he even heard a muffled laugh. Hell, the whole town must be there! A holiday for them; some excitement for their damned little dirty town. And all trying to kill one man who hadn't done a thing to one of them. It wasn't fair—it wasn't fair! Pity for himself, trapped and alone, swept over Faro Ed; he was almost crying. He was shivering all over as though he'd fall to pieces. And, outside of that, he had a queer feeling that he'd never had before; he seemed to be growing cold, and partly numb. Hell, he must be bleeding a lot from those two bullets! His head felt queer, and light.

A voice came, right beside him, a young man's voice, high pitched and nervous.

"You can't have the money!"

That young fellow in the bank. He *couldn't* be here! It was his head—those bullet holes doing something to his head.

"Uh—see this! . . . What if we found a gold mine?"

A gray shape was standing before him, partly between him and a window; it was holding out something—a piece of quartz. Why had he shot the poor kid? He could have got along with the horse he had.

"See that little red water hole. She sho' looks a long way down!"

Faro Ed twitched in horror and shrank back against the wall. Without his knowing it, his finger tightened on the trigger of his gun. There was a terrific report in that tight little place. The soft lead bullet struck the safe and spattered back, pieces of it pitting his face—they missed his eyes. Again that calm drawl outside; sounded as though the man might be casually chewing tobacco.

"He's gettin' rattled, boys. Be ready if he tries a break."

Should he put a bullet through his own head? That would fool them! Hell, he couldn't stand it here until daylight! He placed the muzzle against his temple. No —no—no! He jerked it away. He didn't have the guts. For the first time in his life, he admitted the truth about himself. He didn't have the guts. But he couldn't stand it here till daylight!

"Pardner, that little red water hole . . ."

With a sobbing oath, Faro Ed came to his feet and started running across the floor. He could run; he hardly felt the pain in his leg now. But he ran slowly, weakly. At the window, he paused a moment or two, his gun blazing through in a quick rain of shots. It was empty now; it was snapping lightly on dead primers. He flung himself through; he rolled over in the dirt, his fingers still clutching that empty revolver.

"Get him!" snapped a commanding voice. Some hick deputy sheriff!

He got to his feet painfully and started running again. He went nearly ten feet before he fell. He could feel things striking him, but there was no pain any more. Curiously, it was becoming light, but the light was only a sort of bright red haze before him. He was crawling on his hands and knees; he had lost the gun now. Then his legs were dragging, and he was trying to pull himself along with his hands. He did, for a yard or so, and then his fingers were merely clawing at the ground ahead of him. That red haze was fading slowly, into darkness. The darkness engulfed him, and then for a moment it faded back into the haze. He was dimly aware of men standing around him, and of little points of light in some of their hands; they were striking matches. He heard a girl's voice.

"An' I get the reward—no?"

"Sho' do, gal. You worked it slick as—"

He didn't hear the rest of it; it dwindled quickly into a buzz.

He didn't know it, but presently lanterns came; the fat old man from the livery stable had one in his hand. They milled around him, looking down at him. The deputy sheriff tugged at the drooping ends of his stringy, graying mustache. The coroner stood up from his examination.

"Pretty well perforated. That's all; take him an' plant him any time you want to."

The deputy gave another tug at his mustache. "I thought, from the description, he'd look younger—they didn't have no photo of him. Figgered he'd put up more of a fight, after how he broke jail over in Colby. Killed two deppities, an' busted the sheriff's arm with a bullet. Acted pretty ratty here."

Mike Ballinger, the saloon owner, was there. He was a big, fat man. He nodded his little bullet head.

"Well, that's the end of Buddy Kelso—toughest young devil ever shot a man in the back for four bits. I thought he'd look younger too. A man looks different dead." The cigar rolled back to the other side. "Sheriff Wilson comin' over from Colby to git what's left of him, or to identify him?"

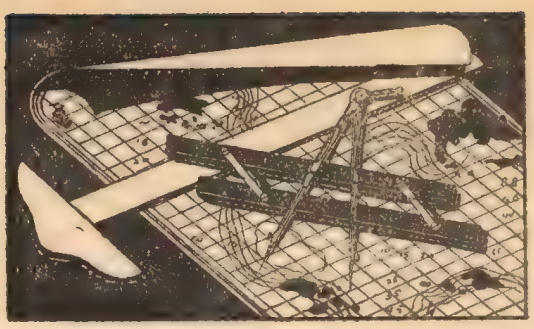
The local deputy answered.

"Naw. He wired me to jest plant him somewheres, an' he'd be over next week to git his sorrel. Of all the nerve! Comin' right into town ridin' the sheriff's horse he got away with in that jail break! If Anette here hadn't happened to notice him ridin' into the livery stable—"

So somebody carelessly daubed *Buddy Kelso* on a rough board and stuck it up loosely at the head of the fresh mound. And to this day nobody knows what became of Faro Ed. Nobody but some of his pals; they say he was foxy enough to go where he wasn't known and settle down as a businessman. The story got added to, until some report that he got to be a deacon in the church there. It was a good story, and likely; Faro Ed always had been clever.

Of course it would all have happened differently if Ed had not turned so quickly after the young cowboy picked up that heavy, jagged piece of quartz. But the Red Pool had to have its victim.

# The Golden Gully



## By KENNETH PERKINS

***Author of "Escape from Limbo," etc.***

THE Personnel Director at Lowney Southwest Aircraft looked up at this next applicant and after a long stare gave him a grin. "I been reading things about you, Joe!"

Joe Morley's freak automobile accident was written up at some length in the papers three months after it had happened. The write-ups had a touch of humor because if a story ever sounded like an alibi this was it. Joe had been on his way home to see his wife, and in a big hurry—according to his confession—going about eighty on a straight stretch of the Coast Highway. Then he hit fog and hurtled over some sand dunes, hard-packed sand that did not overturn his car until he was far out on the wet flatness of a low-tide beach.

He could not remember what had really happened until he found himself in the water, still in a dense fog. He must have climbed out of the wrong side of his car, he said, because a breaker was dragging him seaward. He could not have been very far from shore when a fishing boat picked him up. It was a Japanese fishing boat, a small motor-schooner, and they were poaching so they would not take him to the nearest point—either San Pedro or Huntington Beach or perhaps Balboa. This showed that Joe was pretty vague about where the accident happened in the first place.

The rest was much clearer, and also reasonably credible. The Japanese just kept on their own course and Joe never did get off the boat until they put in at an island of the Japanese Mandate weeks later. Joe got home washing dishes on a freighter.

What made this especially good for a newspaper yarn was the fact that the parts that sounded the wildest were the most easily verified. There was the freighter's skipper, for instance, who brought the castaway back to the States. And there was the American consul at Marcus Island who made a report, giving the version of the Japanese fishermen. Yes, they had picked Joe up in a thick fog, half-drowned and for a long time unconscious.

And all this newspaper publicity was the reason for the Personnel Director saying what he said. "If anyone ever boasts about their travels in front of you, Joe, you can give 'em the old one, 'You've

***". . . . He Said This War Had Got a Lot of Scientists Working on New Problems***

never been nowhere or seen nothin'—you tell 'em!" He looked down at the application Joe had filled out.

It was the average record of any young fellow with a year or two of college and some mechanical training; a few odd jobs in garages, a few months in a flying school, a pilot's license, then about a year here in Lowney Southwest. But that was the end of the normal part of the record.

There followed six months in the experimental plant of that famous aerodynamicist, Dr. Isaac Steinhart, and there had ended with the wild ride down the Coast Highway.

"I guess that covers your previous experience, Joe. Except how did you happen to leave here and go work for Steinhart?"

"I needed the money. I was just married."

The Personnel Director remembered that point. Joe Morley's wife used to bring him here to the plant in a new car they were buying, and out of the thousands of cars that were parked around the aircraft works that little roadster stood out. The director remembered it for the simple reason that anybody who saw Celia Morley saw something unforgettable. She dressed and looked like a Hollywood star, was not yet twenty and wore jewels. The jewels were being paid for like the car, doubtless, by installments.

"Yes, I see what you mean," the director said. "Then you lost your job when Steinhart's plant was sabotaged. Or was it sabotaged?"

"Maybe it wasn't," Joe said. "Maybe the old doc blew up his own plant because his secret was going to get out. All I know is a lot of Army officers kept coming up there investigating. He was working on a new type of plane—more like a rocket, which had power inside itself so it could keep on going. Those Army men were worked up. They said he could shoot off a salvo of those rockets and destroy every airplane factory here in Southern California right from where his plant was. It was up in the Sierra Madres behind Mt. Lowe, guess you know that. But no one knows the real truth of it all. He was aiming at something bigger—and crazier."

"Well, listen, Joe," the director said breezily. "I got a long line of applicants waiting, so we'll brush this up. Now let me think, the best department to put you—" He looked down at the application again. "What sort of work did you say you were doing at Steinhart's?"

"Experimenting. I mean he was experimenting on me. He had me in the control cabin and I'd work the pressure gauges to check how long I could stay in the cabin. Rightly speaking it was a decompression chamber so I wouldn't get this thing pilots have which is the same as a deep-sea diver's bends. He told me that when a pilot flies too high too fast his blood boils and he loses reasoning power and memory. Anoxemia, you call it here. I'd call it just oxygen starvation. So he kept me in the chamber, first an hour, then two, then three."

"Let me get this straight. You mean Steinhart was figuring on firing a rocket with a man inside—and you were to be the man!"

"No. I wasn't to be the man when he fired it. He was just using me to see how the air pressure would affect me up here—" Joe touched his forehead. "Nitrogen forming tiny bubbles in my blood—he didn't want that to happen. It dazes you, then paralyzes you. And he was afraid of what the concussion would do when he started the thing off. He experimented a lot with explosives, right near me, checking up on what I'd do. He had me at the control board going over his directions hour after hour till they were automatic, know what I mean? The same as a fellow who's drunk and doesn't know what he's doing but can play a pretty good game of cards. I've done that, and not remembered a damned thing."

"But your technical experience," the director said, returning to the subject.

"Those six months with Steinhart gave you some training—in what?"

"In not drawing conclusions till your brain's clear," Joe said seriously. "He kept all his figures to himself. He had a lot of blueprints of trajectories—I mean the path a projectile takes. And I got to thinking: if it's a matter of hours he's testing me for, where the Sam Hill is this thing going when it's fired off!"

"I guess it's lucky for you," the director laughed, "that somebody blew that plant up!" He rang for his stenographer. "Show the next man in," he said. "Joe, you have lunch with me, soon as I finish up with this line."

AT twelve o'clock they found a table in a corner of the jammed lunchroom across the street. Joe had steak and onions and three glasses of milk. After every mouthful he puffed hungrily at a cigarette. From the way he ate, the Personnel Director could see that his nerves were still pretty shaky.

"That car accident you were in, Joe, are you sure you aren't going back to work too soon?"

"I didn't get hurt," Joe shrugged. "Just a few bumps. Good ones. You see I got in the car up at Steinhart's. Excuse me, but I can't seem to leave him out of it. It was that last session I had in the control cabin. It was hours. And I'd noticed everything was fixed to start—food, radio, a Mae West—I mean a life-belt in case I landed at sea. And that night Steinhart tried a new stunt with his atom-crusher. The explosion gave me a wallop, I'll tell you. I thought my brains were squeezed out through my ears. I'd just told him I didn't want to work for him any more. He had doubled my salary but I was getting scared. I'd have lapses of memory in that air-tight cabin. My fingers were all right, yes; and I could handle everything and read everything—the altimeter and inclinometer and instrument dials. But I got so I was imagining things —all along a certain line. It got me nuts."

The director finished his sandwich. "What got you nuts?"

"Why, working there six months, doing the same thing over and over again and wondering just what for. I had a hunch what for and it kept worrying me till I dreamed about it. Then that last time I came out of the control cabin of the rocket—I mean after the atom-crusher stunt—I had a definite feeling that something had happened to me. I thought the ground I was walking on wasn't really ground. That's simple enough when you're badly dazed, I admit—as if there was a springboard under you shooting you up so that every step's a jump. It was terrible. There were air bubbles in my blood all right! Enough to make me float off the ground. The rocks I was walking on, I thought—well, I can't explain it."

"Let's have a cigar. Another glass of milk? What'd you say you can't explain?"

"There's a gully right below the big shack which was Steinhart's plant," Joe said. "And I must have wandered down there, my mind being a blank. I can't even remember talking to Steinhart when I came out of the cabin. And I still had on my oxygen mask. Maybe that's what made the thing so terrible—terribly real, I mean. For instance, I remember finding some iron pyrites in that gully near his plant which glittered like gold. I'd seen it there before, but this time when I picked some up a funny feeling went through me. The stuff is pretty light compared with real gold; but it was so dam' light it surprised me. I ought to say, shocked me. I put some of the pieces in my pockets and then filled an oil tin that I must have picked up from the can dump. The can dump was right below Steinhart's shack. Well suppose you filled a gallon can with gold?"

"You couldn't lift it."

"Exactly. But this iron pyrites was only fool's gold, so I could lift it easily enough. And that's what gave me that funny idea. The gravity on the moon is only a fraction

of what it is here. 'Everything's light,' I remember saying to himself. 'That's why I can carry a gallon of gold that weighs as much as three-four men!' And another thing; the stars were dazzling bright, and Orion was up there, even though it was summer! And did *that* knock me for a loop!"

"You had the illusion you'd landed on the moon. What about it? How'd you snap out of it?"

"I'm hardly snapped out yet, if you want to know the truth. Everything I did there was what Steinhart told me a man would have to do—maybe generations from now, when some day someone's going to turn the trick. He said this war has gotten a lot of scientists working on new problems. Ever since the last war we know a lot about the stratosphere which would have sounded like a crazy dream maybe thirty years ago. And look at us now—going to New York over night in our strato-liners."

"So Steinhart was really going to try something like that!" the director grunted.

"No. Steinhart only said that somebody's going to do it—*some* day. After all, television is really more unbelievable. But we won't believe that chunks of metal are thrown from one planet to another even though we can see meteors any night we want to look. Yes," Joe Morley said slowly, "I think Steinhart was going to try it—if something hadn't slipped up and blown his whole plant to smithereens."

The director's interest was mounting—that is to say, his interest in Joe. "You mean you knew he was going to try it and yet you kept that job!"

"He didn't come right out and tell me so. He knew I'd back out. I had a wife to think of. He told nobody. He was afraid people would lose confidence in him—in his great reputation. All he was doing before he died was to work out all the formulas and a model and the human element thrown in. I was the human element. He even showed me how a man could get back from there, if he ever reached there. He had me work all the gadgets and dials according to a star map. That's when I began to get scared. What if this nut tries something, I thought! Mind you, he was a great man. The Army bunch knew it and said they use a lot of his principles at the Fort Sill School of Fire in Oklahoma. He was the last word in ballistics. But it ate into me; that's why that delusion as you call it—was so damnably—well, *real!* You see he taught me how to aim the thing back to the earth by taking bearings on Orion. That's why I dreamed I saw Orion."

"But how could you aim it?"

"It'd take too long to tell you. He took hours drilling me. But the general principle was simple enough. It was like a snub-nosed glider without wings or engine. But it had a propelling power. And I mean power! That's where the atom-crusher came in. It's like this; when Uranium atoms are split in two parts a terrific energy is released, making atomic bullets. And these split more atoms, and they split still more. Works in a chain. Or like a string of firecrackers. Well, the first firecracker gets you started; it explodes the next. And you keep going—"

"Infinitely," the director put in.

"Well not infinitely. Not for ever. But a tolerable distance!"

"And you'd start another string of atomic explosions to get back."

"That's the part of it that scared me. Obsessed me I guess is the right word. It obsessed me when I got into that car and started home."

"That's the night you didn't get home?" the director said, grinning.

"I'll say I didn't get home! That ride ended up almost in Yokohama! I drove like a bat out of hades, because I was in such a hurry to get back to Celia and tell her what had happened to me. Something had happened to my head, I knew that, same as you know sometimes when you're dreaming and you try to wake yourself up. Well I couldn't wake myself up,

couldn't shake it off—that feeling I had about hurtling through space. The dashboard of the car kept turning into the instrument board in that projectile-glider. I saw all the dials right there! Not automobile dials but altimeter and turn-and-bank indicator and the gyro-horizon. That's because I'd been living with them, dreaming about 'em, going crazy over 'em for six months, you can understand that? Anyway, I felt I was spinning towards the earth until my car struck that thick fog. And that was just plain curtains. I'm not keeping you?"

The director looked at his watch. "Let's get back to the office."

AS THEY crossed the street to the plant, the director caught a glimpse of Joe's wife. She had come out on the bus from Glendale during her lunch hour, evidently to find out if Joe was going to get his job. She looked older and very worried, but more attractive in a way.

"Don't worry about Joe's getting placed here," the director said.

"Not as a test-pilot?" she asked anxiously.

"No. I'm taking him over to Methods Research. He's got a lot to tell those fellows they'll listen to." He asked her to wait in his office, but she had to get back to work. She had a job herself now, in a millinery shop at Glendale. The last thing she said when Joe kissed her goodby was, "No more test-flights, Joe! Promise!"

"You don't want him dumped in the Pacific again, is that it?" the director laughed. As she got on the bus, he said to Joe, "Too bad you wrecked that snappy little car she used to ride around in. But she looks swell—even in a bus."

"Now, wait. Just a minute. What happened to the car I wrecked is something I've got to explain. I had an idea it caught fire before the breakers came up, because the last thing I remember before I was in the water, there was a terrible frying heat. I remember saying to myself, 'I'm hitting the earth's atmosphere now, and the friction's set the whole works on fire.' That's one of the problems Steinhart had worked on for years." Joe Morley wiped his forehead. He looked cornered, baffled. "You see, that car—well, it wasn't our little roadster at all."

"Whose was it?"

"I don't know. But I climbed into *somebody's* car that night. The nearest one at hand I guess. It didn't happen to be mine because Celia had that at home. You see she would call for me on week-ends and take me down from the mountains. She had to give the car up later—after I disappeared—because she couldn't keep up the payments. She thought I was dead of course—blown up with the plant."

The director stopped walking and stared. They had reached the Research Department where a clerk ushered them to an anteroom to wait for the chief. Joe sat down and the Personnel Director turned his own chair so he could stare at him.

"What car *did* you get into, Joe?"

"It must have been Steinhart's because there was no one else up there that night. Steinhart's dead. That's why the car wasn't reported stolen."

"You don't know what car it was, and there seems to be no such car ever heard of—or missed! Joe, did you ride down to the beach and into the Pacific Ocean in a car—*or in something else!*"

"What do you mean?"

"You said you kept imagining it was the glider-projectile. Is there a chance that you actually *were* in the projectile and not in any car at all?"

Joe hemmed, then nodded slowly, "There is that remote chance."

"And was there a chance that Steinhart, knowing you were going to quit the job, decided to try the stunt without telling you; that he fired the projectile—with you inside; and that in firing it, his whole plant blew up?"

"I can't remember the dates," Joe said

evasively. "There were long lapses of memory."

"Couldn't those Japs who picked you up give you some idea of dates?"

"They couldn't speak English. It was weeks later at Marcus Island across the Pacific that I got some inkling of the truth from the American Consul. He said the Japs wouldn't admit being anywhere near the Coast. They didn't belong to the Japanese Commercial Fishing Organizations we have here. You see they were poaching and naturally they lied about it — said they'd never sailed this side of Honolulu. The consul told me not to argue the point with them. It would be easier for him to get me home if I didn't antagonize them by insisting they'd been coasting along California. So he put it down in his report that they had picked me up somewhere between Guam and Yokohama! How do you like that?"

"That's a honey!" But the director's jaw dropped suddenly. He took off his glasses, squinted. Then he gave a dry laugh and put his glasses on again. "Yokohama, ha, ha, ha! Those Japs had a sense of humor."

"But they treated me all right," Joe said. "You see I'd given 'em those nuggets for saving my life."

"You mean the nuggets you picked up near Steinhart's? That explains it. The Japs played a joke on you, paying you back for giving 'em fool's gold."

"Yes, but look. That can of fool's gold was lost with the car, except I'd put some of the nuggets and pepitas in my pocket, remember? Well, I've been up to Steinhart's wrecked plant and hunted around in the debris and all over that gully, thinking maybe I'd found a vein. But there's not a sign of gold anywhere. Just that iron pyrites the way it was in the first place."

"I don't see what you're driving at."

"I'm trying to drive at a conclusion, and with not a ghost of a chance of proof. Steinhart spent six months training my brains. He taught me one thing: keep your mouth shut about conclusions till you've got your proof worked out. Well, how can I prove to the world what happened to Steinhart's rocket when it was destroyed with his plant? Maybe part of it sank to the bottom of the Pacific. It'll never be found if it did. And Steinhart's dead.

"He can't tell you if I was in that rocket when he shot it out to the Pacific. Have I any data left for what you call a scientific conclusion—I'm asking you!"

"And I'm asking you: those nuggets of fool's gold you gave to the Japs—"

"They weren't iron pyrites," Joe Morley said, swallowing hard. "They were real gold."

"But you said you had a heavy can of it that a man couldn't lift. Unless—" The director's eyes bulged.

It was right then that the Departmental Chief came in.

The director said to him in a steady voice, "Dr. Chalmers, here's a man I've brought to you personally. The kind we want; thinks things out from every angle, waits till he's got all possible data before jumping to any wild solution."

The chief looked over the application. "But his education, and experience—"

"He's the type we find it profitable to train ourselves," the Personnel Director said. "As for experience, and especially travel, well this young fellow—you may find out—has been places!"

The chief's eye caught the last item in the application and his brows lifted. "So? You worked for Steinhart!"

The director was muttering to himself, "Been somewhere, a long way—where you can lift a can of gold which would weigh as much as three men. But you *can't* do that—not on this earth!" He checked himself. "You see, Dr. Chalmers, he's the fellow some Japs picked up after an auto accident on the beach."

The chief laughed. "Of course! I read the papers. I see what you mean. 'Been places'—is right!"

# THE MIGHTY BLOCKHEAD

## PART II

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

IN "The Navy Colt," "The French Key," and other top-flight novels, SHORT STORIES' readers have read of the activities of Johnny Fletcher, salesman extraordinary, and Sam Cragg, his mighty partner. In this story there has been discovered in Sam Cragg a likeness to Blockhead the Strong Man—hero of three million kids in the magazines, forty million on the radio and sixty million in the movies.

Johnny and Sam are in New York, broke, and to their horror find themselves with a corpse on their hands, literally in the trunk in which Johnny carries copies of his epic best seller "Every Man a Samson." They manage to remove this unknown corpse, but being known—not at all favorably—to the police, they are under investigation. All the more so since they go to a party in celebration of the success of the comic strip, "Blockhead the Strong Man," where Sam impersonates Blockhead. It turns out the murdered man was business manager for the publishers of "Blockhead" and that one of their crack artists is a girl Johnny has got to know in their hotel.

The police have become very inquisitive and Johnny is asked to explain.

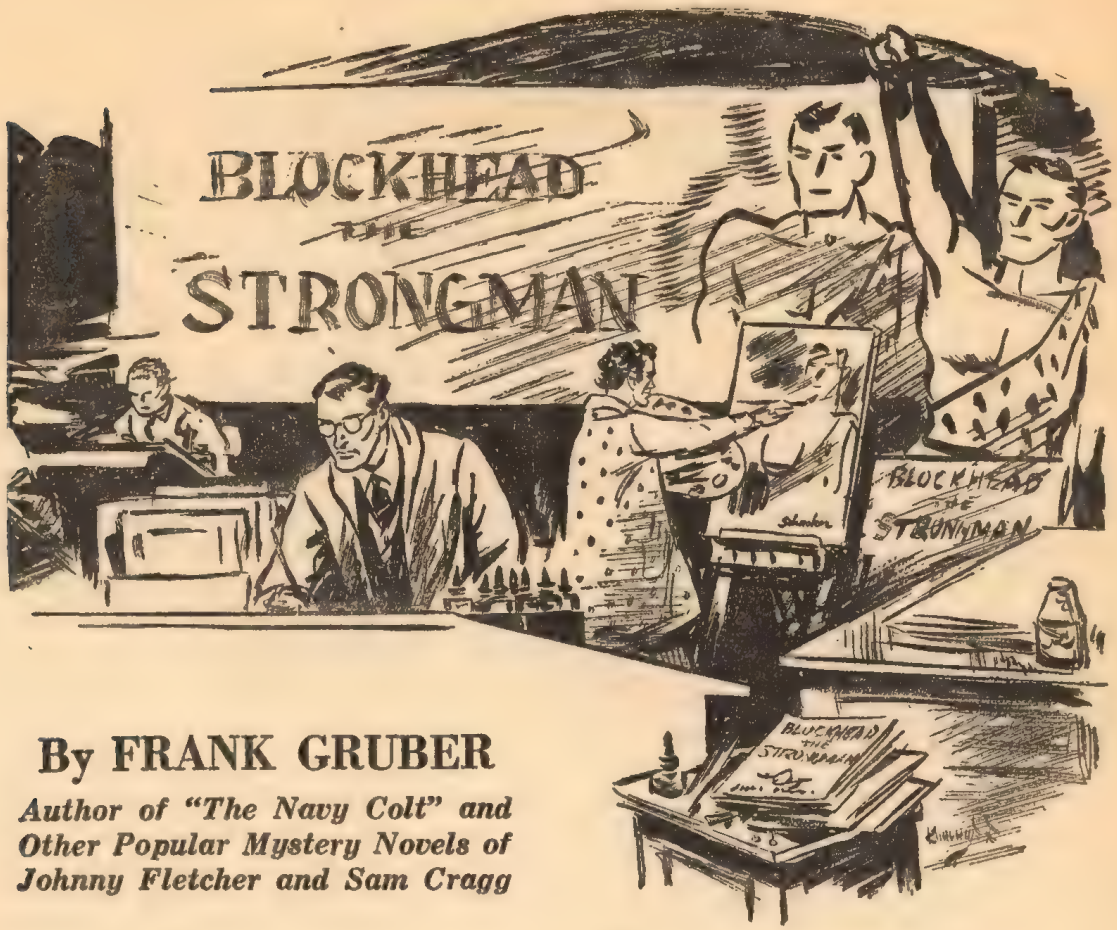
### VII

JOHNNY FLETCHER worried his lower lip with his teeth. Then suddenly he sighed in surrender. "Okay, Madigan. I'll talk."

"I'm not making any promises," the detective said sharply.

"You don't have to. You know damn

***Johnny Fletcher Is in His Glory—He's Playing Detective Once More***




## By FRANK GRUBER

***Author of "The Navy Colt" and Other Popular Mystery Novels of Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg***

well I didn't kill Soderstrom. We checked into this room yesterday afternoon at two o'clock. We came here straight from the bus station. The express company had already delivered our trunk and we had it brought up here. So then we washed up and went out to see Mort Murray, the guy from whom we buy our books. We got back here about five o'clock and Sam opened the trunk. Soderstrom was in it—"

"At five o'clock?"

"A few minutes before five. Well, you can imagine how we felt, opening our trunk and finding a stiff in it."

"I had nightmares last night," Sam Cragg said.

"I'm having them now," Madigan said dryly. "Go on, Fletcher. What then?"

"We didn't know what to do—so we went out to have a drink. That's when we had the brush with Ken Ballinger and Harry Hale. So then we came back—and took the body up to the linen closet on the ninth floor."

"And when'd you meet this girl?"

Johnny cleared his throat. Uh, then. I was going to put the body on the seventh floor and went ahead to see if the coast was clear. Jill's door was open so I had Sam take the body up to the ninth floor instead."

"I see. Now just one thing more. I tumbled to the book trick. You wouldn't let me break open the lock of the trunk, because you hadn't checked over the books. You did that while I was getting the locksmith. But Foxie was outside your door while I was gone—so you didn't get the books out then. Where were they when I looked for them?"

"At the end of a string hanging outside the window."

Lieutenant Madigan snorted. "You know what I think, Fletcher? That you're the biggest liar I ever threw in the clink."

"Every word I told you is the truth."

"Yah! There's only one thing saves you—and I'll bet you don't even know what it is."

"I'm all ears."

"It's the time element. I checked on the register downstairs. "You did check in at two-ten. And Doc Ryerson swears that Soderstrom was killed at least three hours before that time—around eleven. And that makes the problem even tougher."

Johnny whistled softly. "You mean—?"

"Where was the body between eleven and two? Your trunk came to the hotel this morning. They held it downstairs until you checked in, so the body couldn't have been put in *before two.* But where was it since eleven?"

Johnny shook his head slowly. "You gave me an alibi yourself."

"I know it, dammit. I even checked at the bus station on Forty-fourth Street. You came in on the one fifty-five bus. The driver remembers you, since he had you ever since Cleveland and you made yourselves conspicuous enough on the bus. But where was Soderstrom from eleven until two?"

"That," said Johnny, "is the mystery."

"You're telling me? It's driving me crazy." Madigan scowled. "Ballinger's got a hole up on the eleventh floor and he's got an alibi from three o'clock on. Dinky Maguire's—"

"And before three?"

"I'm checking the rest of it. He went down to the office, half-crocked, and Harry Hale sent him home."

"And Hale?"

"Ballinger telephoned him from some dump on Sixth Avenue and Hale went to pick him up. That was around eleven. Both claim they started walking toward the hotel. They stopped at three or four places before they got to Dinky Maguire's. It's a lousy alibi for both of them, but it's the best I can do until I break it down with a stop watch."

"What about Matt Royce, Soderstrom's boss?"

Madigan turned up his palms and shrugged. "As smooth as they come. The big club and business man. He got up at ten o'clock, walked over to the club and had a little work-out, then strolled to business—along about noon. Phooey!"

Johnny Fletcher pursed up his lips and regarded Madigan thoughtfully for a moment. Then he nodded as if reaching a decision.

"Look, Maddy, no use your holding this against me. Or me being sore at you. I like you, so I'll give you a tip. Last night, at Royce's, we burst in on a guy who was in a clinch with Matt Royce's wife. Fella name of Murphy. He made a crack about Royce muscling in on his business and he muscling in on Royce's wife."

"I've got a record of Murphy," said Madigan. "It was given me by—someone."

"Yeah? Well, who—and what—is he?"

"He's an ex-publisher—hey, who's asking the questions here?"

"You."

"All right, then, let me ask them. How'd you get acquainted with Jill Thayer?"

"You want to learn my technique, Maddy? I generally charge for that, but seeing how it's *you,* I'll tell you. I use the subtle, indirect approach; for instance, I see a good-looking dame, I march up to her and say, 'Look, Babe, how's about you and me stepping out?' "

Lieutenant Madigan suddenly had difficulty with his breathing. "Fletcher," he said thickly, "some day you're going to get me sore."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to do *that!*"

"Ah-r-r!" Madigan choked and stamped out of the room. Johnny winked at Sam Cragg.

"That was worked pretty neatly."

Sam sniffed. "By the skin of your teeth. This time. What do you say we chuck the whole thing?"

"I'm willing. How about a good breakfast and then a trip down to see Mort Murray?"

"Mort? Uh, you know what he said yesterday?"

"Yeah, but he didn't really mean that. We only owe him a hundred and fifty dollars. Mort'd starve without us and he knows it. We've only got a few books left; hardly enough to make a pitch. Mmm, I may give him a few dollars on account. A few."

THEY left the hotel, then walked to Broadway where they had breakfast at the Automat. Then they took the subway to Eighteenth Street and walked two blocks to Mort Murray's office on West Sixteenth. It was on the fourth floor of an ancient loft building and consisted of two rooms, one of which Mort used as a storeroom.

There was a sign on the door, *Murray Publishing Company,* but that didn't mean anything because Murray wasn't actually a publisher.

He operated a mail-order business selling books to salesmen. He handled only the one title, "Every Man a Samson," which he bought from the actual publisher in quantity at around thirty-five cents a copy and resold to salesmen for sixty-five cents—when he was able to get his money.

He was a lean, slender young man in his early thirties with unruly black hair. He looked like a Communist but wasn't. He was reading the *Racing Form* when Johnny and Sam stepped into his office, but leaped up when he saw them.

"Hi, fellows! I was just thinking about you."

"Did you see our names in that *Racing Form?*"

Mort coughed. "As a matter of fact there's a good nag in the fourth at Jamaica and I was thinking if I had some dough I'd put a sawbuck on him. The plug can't lose. He practically told me so himself."

"Speaking of money, Mort, that's why we came here. To slip you some. We had a good day yesterday and—"

Mort got very pale. "Money—you come here to give me money?"

"Yeah, sure. Why not? What're the odds on this nag?"

"Twenty to one, but he's a cinch, I tell you. They got him doped wrong—"

"They do that sometimes, don't they? Well, if you're so sure of it, here take this and put it on his nose—"

He handed a couple of bills to Mort. The latter looked at them and cried out hoarsely. "That's only two bucks!"

"It'll earn you forty, won't it?"

Mort Murray grabbed his desk to steady himself. Tears came to his eyes. "Why do you do these things to me, Johnny? I've got a weak heart. First, you talk about giving me a wad on account and then you slip me two bucks."

"Don't you want it? I'm not so well heeled I can't use it myself. I thought in view of your having such a good thing in that race—"

Mort snatched the bills from Johnny's hand. "Cut it out, Johnny. Go way and let me suffer in silence."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it, after all the business I've thrown you in the past."

"Sure, Johnny. No need to get sore. You're the best customer I've got. One year you bought ten thousand books from me—but that was six years ago."

"And I'm going to make a comeback. Things are ripe and I'm feeling better than I ever felt in my life."

"Don't you believe it, Mort," Sam Cragg cut in sarcastically. "We're playing detective again. You know what that means; I get the hell knocked out of me and we wind up without a dime."

"What mess are you in now?"

"Didn't you read in the papers last night about the guy who was found in a linen closet at the Forty-fifth Street Hotel?"

"Yeah, sure, and I knew you were at that joint. I guess I should have known you were mixed up in it. What's the low-down?"

"That's the exact word, Mort. Some lowdown so-and-so pulled a lowdown trick on us and stuffed that corpse in our trunk. *We* put it in the linen closet."

"*I* did," Sam corrected.

"Same thing. Well, you read about this guy being in the publishing business, Mort. That's what I thought I'd ask you about—you being in the same racket. What d'you know about Soderstrom?"

"Nothing, but I've heard of Matt Royce. They say he's a card."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, he's knocked around the fringes of the publishing business for a good many years—and never had a legitimate magazine until he robbed BLOCKHEAD from Joe Murphy."

"Hey," said Sam Cragg, "Murphy's the name of the guy who was necking with the redhead."

"You've got a memory like a elephant, Sammy," Johnny Fletcher said dryly. "So Royce swiped the magazine from Murphy. How?"

"How should I know? Those things never get out. Murphy owned the magazine, or was supposed to own it, then all of a sudden Matt Royce took it over—just when it started clicking."

"Maybe Royce really owned it right along?"

"Could be. I don't know. But he never owned anything decent before. They say he was selling hot dogs at Coney Island eighteen years ago. And I know he was interested in some horse dope sheets. Then a couple of years ago he broke out with BLOCKHEAD and made a million bucks. Maybe I don't live right. Nothing like that ever happens to me."

"Lightning may strike you yet—if you keep going out in the rain. Mmm, ever hear of Hal Soderstrom?"

"Isn't that the name of the guy who got bumped?"

"That's him."

Mort Murray shook his head. "I never heard his name until this."

"He did time for blackmail."

"Even so I never heard of him. But I'm not surprised if he's mixed up with Matt Royce."

"How come? Matt go in for the slip-it-to-me-or-else?"

Mort shrugged. "Do you remember a blackmail sheet that was published in town some years ago called *Town Trumpet?* There was a rumor once that Royce was the guy behind it, but the cops got a dope named Egbert Craddock."

"What'd they do to him?"

"Sent him up. I remember reading about it in the papers."

"The charge was blackmail, eh? Just how did this rag operate?"

"Oh, it was very fancy. The magazine circulated among the smart set and ran articles and stuff on fox hunting and how to drink tea out of a saucer. Then it had a department, which it called *Eavesdropping*. That's where the dynamite was. The editor would send an advance proof of *Eavesdropping* to Joe Dough, with a note saying, 'We thought you might be interested in seeing this advance proof which goes to press the day after tomorrow.' Joe Dough would look it over and see a little item, like: 'Joe Dough is one employer who treats his help swell. Because his secretary had to work overtime so much, Joe bought her a nifty mink coat to keep her warm while going home.' So Joe, knowing that his wife would read that item, has catfits. He telephones *Town Trumpet* and says for gossake, don't run that item and the editor answers news is news and freedom of the press is the sacred right of every newspaperman. So then while Joe Dough is sitting in his office wondering if it wouldn't be better just to

jump out of the window than try to explain to his wife that he bought the fur coat for Julie, the secretary, because she was really cold, what happens but an advertising salesman from *Town Trumpet* is announced. He explains that advertising, after all, is what pays the printer's bill and the editor knows that and is always willing to play ball with an advertiser and they've got too much news anyway that they've got to crowd out some of it and it might as well be the piece about Joe Dough. So Joe buys twelve pages of advertising at a nice rate."

Johnny Fletcher nodded thoughtfully. "About as subtle as a buzz-saw. But it just goes to show how dumb people are. Now me, I'd know right away that if a ginzo was advertising in this rag he's got something to hide."

"That's right," agreed Mort Murray. "But the advertising salesman reminds the advertiser that if he forgets to send in the advertising copy he's got to pay for the space anyway. I used to see issues of *Town Trumpet* without a single ad in them."

"And the editor's name was Egbert Craddock?"

"Yes. He claimed to be the owner of the rag, but the grapevine said it was none other than Matt Royce. There was talk that he paid Craddock to take the rap."

"A three-year rap? Well, I don't feel so badly now about seeing Royce's redheaded wife two-timing him. I think I'll go give Matt the ha-ha."

"Give him a snicker for me, too. On account of I'm jealous of a crook like him hitting the jackpot."

## VIII

THEY left Mort Murray's place and walked to Seventh Avenue, where Sam turned automatically in the direction of the subway station at Fourteenth Street. But Johnny held up his hand and whistled to a cab driver.

"Taxis again?" Sam said sarcastically. "And next week we'll probably be hitchhiking."

"Stick with me and you may be riding in a limousine."

"Yah! A police limousine."

Ten minutes later Johnny paid off the taxi across from the Grand Central Terminal. They entered a towering office building and as they approached the elevators Johnny suddenly nudged Sam.

"Oh-ah, look who's here!"

"Who—where?"

Johnny sidestepped deliberately and collided with a tall man who had an Alabama sheriff's mustache and an absurd potbelly.

Johnny's elbow went into the stomach, bringing a "woof" from the man.

"Hey, look where—*Johnny Fletcher!*"

The potbellied man seemed to flinch away from Johnny, who chuckled wickedly, "Jefferson Todd, the great detective."

Sam Cragg gasped. "Jeff—holy cats! Jeff Todd with a mustache and a bay window!"

"Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg," said Jefferson Todd. "I knew that something unpleasant was going to happen today. I had a premonition."

"I didn't feel so good myself when I got up," Johnny said. "Your mustache is on crooked."

Jefferson Todd clapped a hand to his mouth and left his stomach unguarded. Johnny slapped it. "—and the sofa pillow's slipping."

"Cut it out," snarled Todd.

A gleam came into Sam Cragg's eyes. "Don't tell me, cripes, don't tell me, Jeff Todd's *disguised!*"

"Bingo!" said Johnny. "You win the beautiful Navajo Indian blanket. What gives, Jefferson?"

"I'm working. What do you think? Hello and good-by."

"The same to you, Jefferson." Johnny turned and scanned the building directory. He started at the A's and moved along until he came to the P's, then put his hand

on the directory and let it run down to the R's.

Jefferson Todd exclaimed. "Don't tell me you're going up to see Roy—"

"Royce!" said Johnny. "Hey, *you're* not working for him."

"No, of course not."

Johnny clucked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "No, of course not. He wouldn't be hiring *me* if you were already on the job."

"What?" cried Todd. "*You're* working for Matt Royce?"

JOHNNY closed his left eye in a deliberate wink. "Just a little detective work, you know. Matt said he'd tried a dopey shamus who bungled the job and—"

"Fletcher!" choked Jefferson Todd.

"Huh?"

"Royce didn't say that. And you're not working for him."

"Who says we ain't?" bristled Sam Cragg. "You long-legged beanpole."

But Johnny looked up at Jefferson Todd with innocent eyes. "You *are* working for Royce?"

"Of course I am! Why do you think I'm standing here?"

"How was I to guess? There are forty floors in this building and there should be thousands of tenants."

"I know, I know. But look, Johnny, we're old friends. Let's talk this over."

"Mmm, later. Not now, Jefferson. I'm late for the appointment."

Todd shot out a bony hand and clutched Johnny's arm. "We can make a good thing out of this."

"Later," said Johnny. "Sorry, old man." He removed Todd's hand forcibly from his arm and scooted for an open elevator. Todd tried to follow, but Sam Cragg brushed against him and knocked him off balance. Before Todd could recover, Sam had darted into the elevator and the door was closing.

"Twenty-seven," said Johnny.

On the twenty-seventh floor they found a ground-glass door on which was the legend:

2700—2710
Royce Publishing Company
Blockhead the Strong Man
Matt Royce, President

They entered and found themselves in an anteroom some twenty by twenty feet. There was a big director's table in the center, some fine leather covered chairs and expensive ashstands and pictures of Blockhead the Strong Man all over the walls. Sam regarded them distastefully as Johnny went to a tiny window and rapped on it for attention.

Behind the window, a girl at the switchboard reached up and pushed back the glass a few inches.

"Like to see Matt," Johnny said.

"Who—? Mr. Royce? Have you an appointment?"

"Tell him that it's Johnny — Johnny Fletcher."

The girl shoved in a plug and said into her mouthpiece, "A Mr. Johnny Fletcher to see Mr. Royce. Very well, I'll tell him." She looked up severely at Johnny. "Sorry, but Mr. Royce says he can't see you."

"Ha-ha," said Johnny. "Great guy, Matt. Always kidding. "I'll go right in." He reached for the oaken door to his right—and couldn't turn the knob. "It's locked!"

"That's right," said the switchboard operator, closing the glass window.

Johnny took a coin from his pocket and rapped viciously on the glass. The switchboard operator made faces at him, but pushed back the glass again. "Can't you take a hint?"

"No!" cried Johnny. "You stick in that plug and tell Matt Royce that I want to see him right now—tell him I want to talk to him about, uh, *Town Trumpet.*"

"I'm sorry . . ."

*"Town Trumpet,"* snapped Johnny. "Just tell him that and it'll bring him to heel. Go ahead and tell him that, if you know what's good for you."

The girl frowned and hesitated, but then she made the connection. "This Mr. Fletcher insists on speaking to Mr. Royce. He won't go away. He says it's about—*Town Trumpet.* Yes?" She blinked and looked up at Johnny.

"He says he'll see you." She touched a button on the switchboard and the door at Johnny's elbow made a buzzing sound. The knob turned at his touch.

Inside the switchboard operator called, "Last door on the right."

Johnny and Sam went down a long corridor. They passed an open door and had a quick glimpse of a large room in which a number of artists were huddled over drawing boards. Then they reached Matt Royce's office and discovered that there was an ante-room some ten by ten feet, in which sat Royce's private secretary, who had undoubtedly been selected by Royce's wife.

"Mr. Fletcher?" she asked.

"And Sam Cragg!"

"You may go in."

Johnny had already opened the inner door, revealing a room that looked like the reading room of the Union League Club; at least it was as large and had as many leather armchairs. But it was improved with a couple of couches and a very excellent five-foot bar.

Matt Royce sat on a throne behind an immense teakwood desk. His lips were pressed together tightly and his eyes were cold.

"What's this *Town Trumpet* stuff?" he asked harshly.

*"Town Trumpet?"* Johnny asked innocently.

"You told the girl you wanted to talk to me about *The Town Trumpet."*

*"Town Trumpet?* Oh—I said something to the girl about your having asked me to come down and I jumped at the opportunity. She misunderstood me. Get it? 'Down and jump at.' What's *Town Trumpet?"*

Matt Royce started to get up, then he dropped back to his chair. "What do you want?"

"Why, I don't know. You asked me to come down today and see you. Remember—last night?"

"That was before that policeman came. I don't think I have anything to say to you now."

"No? But what would you have said if Egbert Craddock hadn't been killed?"

"Craddock!" cried Royce. "What do you know about Craddock?"

"Oh, wasn't that Soderstrom's real name?"

Royce looked steadily at Johnny for a moment before speaking. "Lieutenant Madigan didn't mention Craddock's name."

"Because he's foxy. Or maybe he didn't know last night. But I'll bet a cookie he knows now, since Craddock's fingerprints are on file."

MATT ROYCE picked up an envelope opener and toyed with it. Johnny seated himself in a big armchair and made a pup tent with his hands.

Royce finally nodded. "Look, you said something to Madigan last night about helping him on a case? He halfway admitted it, but—well, have you ever been a detective?"

"Just an amateur. But I don't mind admitting that I've solved some rather sensational cases, that baffled the police no end."

Royce sniffed. "Modesty isn't one of your vices."

"Why should it be? If I don't tell people how good I am, how are they going to know it? You tell people how good *Blockhead* is, don't you?"

"There's a slight difference, but let it pass. How would you like to do some investigating for me?"

"Well," said Johnny. "I'd like to very much, but naturally I'd have to take time off from my regular business and as you know, I do pretty well at it."

"How well?"

"I took in sixty dollars last night in just a few minutes."

Royce grunted. "That was an exception. You can't be doing so awfully well, or you wouldn't be living at the 45th Street Hotel."

"Ken Ballinger lives there."

"Yes, that's why I said that. I know what I pay Ballinger."

Johnny cleared his throat. "As it happens the manager of the hotel is an old friend of mine. He'd feel terribly hurt if I stayed anywhere but at his hotel while in New York. So you see—"

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars a day."

"*Mister* Royce!"

"I'm sorry," said Johnny. "As I told you I'm not a regular private detective. Now, I don't know but what you could get some detective for twenty-five to fifty dollars a day. Some lunkhead like, uh, Bill Carnegan or Jefferson Todd, but—"

"Jefferson Todd? You know him?"

"From 'way back! I understand he once caught a kid who robbed apples from a pushcart."

"And you don't think he's a very good investigator?"

"Oh, he's as good as the average that you can get for twenty-five dollars a day. No better, no worse. Why?"

"Just curious. How much do you think your time would be worth?"

"That depends on the kind of case. You want me to find who murdered Egbert Craddock?"

"No."

Johnny blinked. "No? What then?"

"I'll tell you after you decide to accept my offer. I'll give you fifty dollars a day."

"For each of us? Well—"

"I meant for one. I don't know anything about Block—I mean, Cragg, isn't it?"

Sam glowered. "Samuel C. Cragg."

"Very well. Seventy-five dollars a day for the two of you."

"A hundred."

"Seventy-five."

"Seventy-five it is—and five hundred bonus when we wash up the job."

Royce hesitated, then nodded. "It's a deal, with a three-day time limit."

"Three days is plenty. Now, the retainer—"

Royce pulled open a drawer of his desk and took out a packet of bills. He skimmed off two, then dug into his pocket and brought out a twenty and a five.

He pushed the money across the desk. "There it is, three days' pay. The bonus I'll pay when you deliver."

JOHNNY waved his hand over the money and it wound up in his palm. "Swell, now what is this little matter you want me to investigate?"

"Evidence to divorce my wife."

Johnny exclaimed in chagrin. "I never handled any divorce stuff."

Royce looked at him coldly. "I agreed to your price, didn't I? You accepted my money—and it's up to you to do whatever I ask. All right, I want evidence that my wife is—well, has been unfaithful. Dan Murphy."

"Must it be Murphy?"

"Don't crowd me too far, Fletcher. I have reason to believe that my wife is in love with Dan Murphy. I want proof that I can use in court."

Sam Cragg was breathing heavily and Johnny shot a quick look at him. The big fellow was scowling fiercely. Johnny sighed. "You can start figuring out your alimony, Mr. Royce."

"Very well, you have three days. I expect results."

"You'll get them. Mmm, you're not interested in Egbert Craddock's death?"

"I don't know anyone named Craddock. Hal Soderstrom was murdered, but the police are looking into that. I'm hiring you for something else. Understand?"

Johnny didn't reply. He went to the door, turned and saluted, then went through. As they left the office of Royce's secretary, Johnny collided with Jim

Wilder, whom they had met at the party the night before.

"Say! I was hoping you'd show up," Wilder exclaimed. He began sizing up Sam Cragg and nodded in appraisal. "Look, come in here—"

He popped into the room where the artists were huddled over their drawing boards. "Fellows," he cried, "this is the man I was telling you about. Blockhead in person!"

Sam Cragg's face was already dark with anger. He retreated to the door. "Go to hell!"

"Show the men your muscles, Sam," Johnny said.

"Yeah, go ahead," Jim Wilder urged. "That's why I wanted you here today. I think our drawings have been too stiff, awkward in the delineation of anatomy. I wanted the boys to draw you from life —in a lot of different action poses."

"A very good idea," said Johnny Fletcher. "Be worth a lot of money to you, wouldn't it?"

"Naturally, we'd expect to pay for the modeling. I'll talk to Harry Hale about it."

"I heard you," said Harry Hale, coming into the artists' room through a side door.

"Well, what do you think? Some of the stunts Blockhead does are about as true to life as a bowl of wax fruit. Here—" Wilder snatched up a sheet of bristol board. "Look at this, Blockhead being knocked over by a cannon ball. He looks like a sawdust doll. What we want is reality."

"Okay," said Harry Hale, grinning. "Give him the leopard skin and let him strut. Five dollars an hour."

Sam Cragg ducked out of the room. Johnny turned to Harry Hale. "Oh, come now, you're kidding. Five dollars an hour! A Powers model makes more than that and there are a flock of them. You know yourself Sam is the strongest man in the world. You saw his performance last night."

"That's why I'm offering you five dollars an hour. Because I'm hoping you'll refuse it."

"Nix, Harry!" cried Jim Wilder. "You know Ken's on a bat again and—"

"He's been on bats before and he's always made the deadline."

"Yeah, sure, but—"

"Take it up with Royce," Hale snapped.

Johnny made a quick gesture toward the artists. "If Ken does all the drawing what do these boys do?"

"Fill in the background. Coloring. Ken Ballinger's the animator."

"Like Donald Duck?"

HARRY HALE grinned sourly. "In the old days Ken drew the whole book. He did a bang-up job, too. But naturally, he couldn't keep up the pace of turning out 64 pages every month. We write the story in the next room, break it down to the proper number of frames—six to a page. Then Ken makes rough sketches of the action, featuring Blockhead and the other characters.

One of the boys here inks in the action. The others draw in the backgrounds—all of which is planned first. Another does the coloring, puts in the balloons.

One of them letters the dialogue in the balloons. It's all well organized. *Blockhead* will never miss a deadline, even if Ken goes on an occasional binge. We can work around him and in a pinch we could even draw the action, although there isn't anyone does it as well as Ken Ballinger."

"I agree with you there, pal," said Johnny. "Ken certainly does a neat job. I imagine he knocks down some real dough."

"He brings a wagon here every payday, so he can take it home with him," Hale said sarcastically. "Well, we've got work to do here. Drop in again sometime, Fletcher."

"I'll do that little thing. Sometime when I can't stay so long."

## IX

IN THE corridor, Sam Cragg muttered, "I don't like that guy Hale."

"I don't exactly like him like a brother, Sammy. But you got to take people as they come." Johnny opened the door leading to the waiting room and recoiled.

"Fletcher," said Jefferson Todd. "I've got to talk to you."

"Certainly, Jeff, give me a ring some day and we'll get together." He brushed past Todd and reached the outer hall, but there Jeff caught up with him. Even Sam's apparently innocent collision with Todd, which almost knocked the long, lean detective off his feet, did not discourage him.

"I want to know why Royce hired you, Fletcher. No use us working at cross-purposes, is there?"

"Not at all. But you work one way and I work another. You might not see anything in my clues."

"What are they?" Todd asked eagerly.

Johnny shrugged. "Well, I can tell you, you're wasting your time here, watching the buildings. He won't come."

"But he said he would!"

"People say a lot of things they don't mean. I ask you, *why* would he come?"

"How's he going to reach Royce if he doesn't?"

"Oh," said Johnny. "But who takes over when Royce goes home?"

"He's got a bodyguard."

"Mm," said Johnny. "Is the picture Royce gave you a good one?"

Todd started to reach for his inside breast pocket, then caught himself. "Didn't he give you one?"

"Yes, but I forgot mine at the hotel. Let's see if it's the same."

Todd brought a somewhat faded snapshot from his pocket. It showed three men, wearing fishermen's costumes, hip boots and all.

The man in the center was Royce; Royce of ten years ago. The man on Royce's left was a big muscular man whose face was familiar to Johnny. He had seen it before—in his trunk at the 45th Street Hotel. It was Hal Soderstrom, or Egbert Craddock as he had been known in the old days.

The third man was Dan Murphy.

Johnny handed the snapshot to Sam. "Same snap, isn't it?"

"Huh? Oh sure. Yeah."

"You've seen him, Johnny?" Jeff Todd asked hopefully.

Johnny screwed up his mouth and nodded slowly.

"Where?" Todd cried. "When?"

"I'll tell you later, Jefferson."

"Why later? Now's as good a time as any. Time is of the essence, man!"

"Of course, that's why we'll make quicker time if I check into this angle before spilling it to you. Where are you staying?"

"The Bagley. Where are you?"

"The 45th Street, as usual. Run over about five this afternoon."

"All right, but I think you could tell me now . . ."

"No. At five o'clock. Down!" He headed for an elevator that had stopped at the floor. He and Sam made it, but Todd stayed behind.

When they reached the lobby of the building Sam said, "You bamboozled Jeff Todd. Wonder why he's waiting for Murphy here? He can't expect to get divorce evidence in such a public place."

"He's doing it the hard way," said Johnny. "I think we'll take a short cut on this job, without the keyholes."

"Yeah?"

"Lulu likes big, strong men. I'll get you and her together, snap your picture—and the dough's ours. Whaddya say?"

A gleam came into Sam's eyes. "Could do. She's nice."

"Huh? You're serious?"

"Why not? You know I like them, uh, you know—"

"Yeah," said Johnny, thoughtfully. "We'll give Lulu a jingle or something—

this afternoon. Couple of people I want to see at the hotel."

"Jill Thayer?"

"And a lad who holes up in Room 717."

"Ken Ballinger?"

"No, he lives upstairs somewheres. I forgot to tell you about this chappie. Last night when I peeked into Jill's room this fella came in—with a key."

"That's the guy you asked Eddie Miller about. The one with the Swedish name."

"All Johnsons aren't Swedes. I didn't get to tell you about this chappie. Last night when I peeked into Jill's room he came in—with a key."

"Where'd he get it?"

"That's what I want to ask him."

By this time they were well into the Grand Central and descending to the subway, got into a shuttle train and rode across to Times Square. A few minutes later they turned into 45th Street. As they approached Dinky Maguire's, Johnny wheeled and headed for the door. Sam started to protest, but Johnny ignored him and entered the narrow cafe.

It was the slack time of the day so there were only a few customers at the bar. They were gathered around Ken Ballinger, the cartoonist, who was complaining drunkenly about the international situation.

"So then we lick the Nazzies and what have we got? We got the biggest navy in the world. We ain't going to melt it down like we did the last time and if we keep it it'll bust us trying to feed it. My idea is that we make it self-supporting. Let them go out and take what they can, split up half of the boodle and turn the other half over to the government."

"Hi, Ken!" Johnny said cheerfully. "How about a drink?"

Ken blinked owlishly at Johnny Fletcher. "Who're you? I don't know you."

Then he shifted to Sam Cragg. "Blockhead, huh? The guy who thinks he's tough. Well, look, I been thinkin' things over and I don't think you're so awfully tough. In fact, I figure on choppin' you down to my size. C'mon, put up your dukes!"

"Gee!" exclaimed Sam. "Whattaman!"

"Hey!" cried the bartender. "No rough stuff in here. I remember you birds from yesterday."

"No rough stuff today," said Johnny. "Look, Ballinger, we're working for Royce now. That makes us stablemates, huh?"

"Royce sent you to find me?"

"Practically. Harry Hale actually suggested it. He's worried about you."

"Yah! All Harry Hale's worried about is himself, the chiseling so-and-so."

"And Jill's worried about you."

An expression of pain crossed Ballinger's face. "Did she send you?"

JOHNNY looked steadily at Ballinger, then nodded. At that moment the bartender whacked a baseball bat on the bar. "Now, lookee here, you two, you started a rough house here yesterday and I won't have another. Get the hell out of here."

Ken Ballinger whirled. "Who you talkin' to, you lousy bum?"

Sam Cragg picked him up under the armpits and carried him to the door. He deposited him on the sidewalk, but kept hold of his arms and continued to propel him forward. Ken was swearing luridly but Sam silenced him with a kick in the seat of the trousers. Johnny strolled leisurely behind Sam and Ken, but closed up when they entered the 45th Street Hotel. In the elevator he said, "Seven!"

"Twelve!" Ballinger cried.

"Seven," Johnny repeated firmly and they were let off at the seventh floor. Johnny rapped on the door of Room 721.

It was opened by Jill Thayer. Her face showed annoyance. "You've got the wrong place. This isn't the Times Square Subway Station."

"We brought him here to keep him out of trouble," Johnny said.

"I c'n take care of myself," Ballinger muttered sullenly.

"Your bosses don't think so," Johnny said cheerfully. "They're about ready to hire someone else to do Blockhead."

"Let them try. I've got Matt Royce over a barrel and he damn well knows it—"

"Ken!" Jill Thayer said sharply. "You're talking too much. Why don't you go upstairs and sleep it off?"

"I'm all right. I've only had a few drinks and I'm sick and tired of Matt Royce thinking he can shove me around. I got a good notion to tell him off. I know where the body's buried—"

"In a trunk?" Johnny asked.

Jill Thayer turned blazing eyes on him. "You think you're awfully smart, Johnny Fletcher. I've a good notion to tell you what I think of you and your tricks. Why don't you mind your own business?"

"This *is* my business. Someone dumped a corpse in my lap, but it was yours originally. Remember?"

"That's a lie!"

"I couldda snitched to the cop, when he had the heat on me. I didn't. You ought to give me some credit for that."

"I give you credit for being the biggest liar I've ever known."

Johnny assumed an injured air. "And I was trying to do your boy friend a favor. It isn't just Matt Royce who's down on him, it's Dan Murphy—"

"Murphy!" cried Ballinger. "Why, that lousy strip-tease impresario, I'll boot him up and down Forty-second Street. What I don't know about that—"

"Ken!" Jill Thayer stepped forward and slapped his face. Ken took the blow and looked at her stupidly for a moment. Then he began to cry.

It was a gradual process. First his mouth and chin quivered, then tears began to stream down his cheeks, and finally his body shook from wracking sobs.

"Get out of here," Jill Thayer shouted at Johnny Fletcher.

Sam had already backed out. Johnny shrugged and stepped to the elevators. He pushed the down button.

"Up," Sam Cragg said.

The red light showed over the door. Johnny pushed Sam into the elevator.

When they reached the lobby Johnny steered Sam to the door. The latter growled, "What was the idea of that business, Johnny?"

"Talk. Get somebody mad and they spill things. Ken Ballinger says he knows where the bodies are buried. He's got something on both Royce and Murphy."

"He talked like blackmail," Sam said. "Me, I don't care a lot for blackmailers."

"I don't either. But remember what Mort Murray said about Matt Royce owning *Town Trumpet*. If that's true, he deserves to be blackmailed himself."

"Just the same I don't like it. I can't say that I like Royce, but we did take his dough."

"That's right. We're working for *him* and that's where we're going now. To look up Dan Murphy. He's a burlesque man, it seems."

"Burlesque?"

"Ballinger said strip-tease impresario and he said something about kicking him up Forty-second Street, so that's where we ought to find him."

"Yeah, but there are a dozen burlesque houses between Seventh and Eighth Avenue alone."

"Not that many. It just looks like it. I'll find out in a minute."

## X

THEY had turned into Broadway and were approaching 42nd Street. Johnny stopped at a newsstand. "Hi, Mac," he greeted the newsie. "Look, I'm going over to see Dan Murphy and I forget which burlecue joint he hangs out at."

"The hot one," replied the newsie. "The Pom Pom."

"Thanks, pal

"Say hello to Gertie for me," the newsboy called after them.

Johnny chuckled. They turned west on Forty-second Street, passed two burlesque houses and reached the Pom Pom. A lean young man was giving a spiel in front of the theatre.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry!" he cried in a tremendously deep voice. "Hurry, hurry, hurry, you're just in time to see a complete stage show. The most beautiful girls on Broadway—"

"Forty-second Street," Johnny corrected.

The barker gave him a fishy stare. "Hurry, hurry, hurry, if you want to see the most beautiful girls on Broadway—"

"I want to see Dan Murphy," Johnny said. "Where's his hole?"

"Inside. Get your tickets at the box-office. Hurry, hurry, hurry—"

Johnny breezed past the ticket window and moved upon the ticket-taker. "I'm going in to see Dan Murphy," he said.

"Sure," replied the ticket-taker. "After you buy a ticket."

"Nix, I'm not going in to see the show—"

"Ha-ha-ha," the ticket-taker laughed mirthlessly.

"Then tell Dan Murphy to come here."

"Can't leave the door. Buy a ticket or scram. Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

Johnny muttered under his breath and went back to the ticket window where he paid out a dollar and ten cents for two tickets. He thrust them at the ticket-taker.

"All right, now where's Dan Murphy's office?"

"Right inside on the left. But he ain't here. He hadda go out."

"When's he coming back?"

"Can't say. I only work here. Maybe a minute, maybe an hour."

"We can wait, Johnny, can't we?" Sam asked.

Johnny caught the eagerness in Sam's tone and shook his head. "All right, Sammy."

They went into the theatre. A film so old and faded that it was streaked was being shown on the screen. Johnny and Sam found seats on the aisle near the rear.

The picture ran for twenty minutes, then the house lights went on. "I'll see if Dan's come in," Johnny said. He got up and went to Murphy's office. The door was locked.

He returned to his seat, beside Sam. A candy butcher, with a voice almost as loud as that of the barker outside the theatre was giving his sales talk about "the delicious, chewy, chocolate covered caramels—ten cents—and many boxes containing valuable premiums—"

Johnny groaned. The head candy butcher finished his spiel and his assistants began shaking down the audience. They made a hideous din as each hawked the candy in raucous tones. Every now and then one of them let out a yell: "Here's a gentleman wins a solid gold, 18-jewel watch!"

"Gee!" exclaimed Sam. "I think I'll buy a box of that candy."

"Don't be a fool, Sam. Only the shills win the prizes."

The candy men worked the audience for ten minutes, then began all over with ice cream and pop. When they had sold all who would buy they tried nuts and finally gave the candy another crack. By the time they stopped the audience was hooting and stamping and finally the lights went on and the curtain went up and an orchestra with too much brass made noise and the girls came on and sang and cavorted.

They were followed by the stock comedians who worked the usual bawdy variations of the, Who-was-the-lady-I-saw-you-with-last-night gag.

The audience began applauding before the comedians were finished with their routine. But they weren't cheering the comics; they were clapping them off the stage, so the strip-tease "artist" could come on.

Johnny left his seat once more. This time he found Dan Murphy's office open. Murphy was sitting behind a desk wearing a derby and chewing an unlighted cigar.

"Hi, Murphy," Johnny greeted him.

Dan Murphy scowled, then recognized Johnny. "The book salesman. Say, I was just thinking about you. That wasn't a bad routine you and your stooge worked. I might be able to use you."

"For what?"

"The show? Whaddya s'pose? That's why you're here, ain't it?"

"Yeah," said Johnny. "That's right. Mmm, what do you figure an act like ours is worth?"

"With some snappy jokes I'll start you at a hundred a week. For the act, of course. And I'll tell you what, I got a couple fellas here are very good on the funny stuff. They'll write you up a routine. You'll like it. How's your stooge on the dumb stuff? He looks dumb, but can he talk dumb?"

"It's natural with him. But he won't stand for the leopard skin."

"Oh, we can work out some other costume for him. He looked pretty good in the leopard skin, though."

"Just like Blockhead. By the way, didn't you have something to do with Blockhead once?"

Murphy grimaced. "I invented him."

"You did? I thought it was Matt Royce's idea?"

"Yah!" jeered Murphy. "All Royce ever invented was ways to muscle in on somebody else's ideas. I discovered *Blockhead* and started him on the way to his first million circulation. Then Royce stepped in and took him away from me."

"How could he do that if the book was doing so well?"

"That's what made me so sore. I was publishing comics for four-five years on a shoe-string. I just about starved, but the printer carried me. They can do that, you know. Even if they only get two-thirds of their money it's worth while for them to keep a job going. Takes up the slack in the shop. Anyway, I was on the books for a measly fifty grand. Six months of Blockhead and I'd have wiped it out. But no, Royce gets wind of a good thing and what does he do? He buys into the printer and puts the squeeze on me. Kicks me out and takes over Blockhead. In six months he owned the print shop. It was that crook Harry Hale who sold me out. I picked up Hale when he was wearing turtle neck sweaters because he couldn't afford to have his shirts laundered."

"Hale used to work for you? Ballinger, too, I suppose."

"Yeah, sure. The kid had a good idea but didn't know what to do with it. I put it over for him."

"Blockhead was really Ballinger's idea?"

"Oh yeah, but ideas are a dime a dozen. Ballinger peddled Blockhead all around. Even the newspaper syndicates turned him down. It was pretty amateurish. I pumped it up and got him to do snappier drawings, then sold the strip. Another publisher might have muffed it."

"So now you're managing a burlesque house."

Murphy looked sharply at Johnny. "Eh?"

"I mean, isn't it funny the way us smart guys always lose out and the dummies clean up?"

"That's *very* funny. Only I didn't say Matt Royce was a dummy. He's anything but. That guy's smarter than you and I put together. And crookeder."

Johnny smacked his lips. "In business. But you're getting even. You know—last night."

"What about it?"

"Why, I like redheads myself."

Dan Murphy's eyes narrowed. "You're wrong about Lulu. She's divorcing Royce."

"Really? But doesn't she have to, well, leave her husband's home to do that?"

"She has," Murphy said savagely. "Now, what else can I tell you that Royce ought to know?"

"Royce, ah?"

"You're a dick, ain't you? That phoney song-and-dance last night didn't fool me a damn bit. And why're you here today?"

"My pal wanted to see a good leg show."

"The show's out there."

"Okay, Murph, I can take a hint."

Johnny crossed the foyer and entered the auditorium, where bedlam reigned. He found Sam Cragg clapping and whistling. He had to tap him twice before Sam turned.

"Whee!" Sam exulted. "I thought for a minute she was going to take off—"

"Come on, Sam," Johnny said sharply. "You've seen enough."

"Enough? Heck, the show hardly started."

"For you it's ended. We're going to the Public Library to do some refined reading—to wipe this out of your mind."

Sam got up and walked out to the foyer with Johnny, but he was quite unhappy about it. "What can you see at the Public Library?"

"We're working men. We can't make any money at a leg show."

They left the burlesque theatre and crossing the street caught a crosstown street-car, in which they rode to Fifth Avenue, where they got off and entered the big New York Public Library.

Inside Johnny made inquiry at the information desk and was directed to the periodical room. In the latter room the attendant looked at him in surprise. *"Town Trumpet?* The files are out at the moment."

"Out? I thought you didn't let people take them from the room."

"We don't, but you see—"

"Johnny Fletcher!" called Lieutenant Madigan.

Johnny whirled. Lieutenant Madigan was sitting at a desk a short distance away. A number of bound volumes were at his elbow and one of them was open before him.

Johnny went over. *"Town Trumpet?"* he read the title on the volume. "Hot stuff, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh, and I suppose you were going to read the back issues of *Little Ladies?"*

An attendant came up. "Quiet, please; this is a reading room."

Johnny snickered. "And this is a cop; you can't tell him to keep quiet."

Lieutenant Madigan glared at the library attendant. Then he grunted at Johnny. "So you're sticking your nose into it?"

"Some people collect stamps. What'd Craddock go up for?"

"Craddock?"

"Oh, I'm not *that* far behind you, Lieutenant. Craddock was Soderstrom. He was the editor of *Town Trumpet.* But who'd he shake down? I mean, the one that proved it on him."

A woman named Smithson. Craddock got a tough break. He started this squeeze, but before he could wind it up, the lady's husband caught her anyway, so it didn't make any difference and she turned the heat on Craddock. But she doesn't figure in this. She married a cowboy six years ago."

"And Smithson?"

"He lost his roll in Wall Street and jumped out of a window. So *he* couldn't have done it to Craddock."

"Then who did?"

"That's why I'm reading. But I'm about ready to quit. The last issue of *Town Trumpet* came out almost seven years ago. A lot of the people mentioned in it are still around, but the trouble is there are so many of them it'd take months to check on all of them. And that might not have been the motive at all."

"I think you've got something there, Maddy. If Craddock went up the river seven years ago, it's four since he came back. Why wait four years?"

Madigan frowned. "That's what I was thinking. But I didn't want to pass up any bets. Look, what's your angle?"

"Royce could tell a lot of things."

"Yeah, if we still used rubber hoses. But we don't—and we never did use them on guys worth a million bucks. Royce is a pretty cool customer."

"He's got a wife. She's divorcing Royce."

Madigan's eyes lit up. "Since when?"

"Since today, I gather."

"Then she's still plenty sore. Mmm, she may talk."

"Women do talk," Johnny said. And put his tongue into his cheek. He'd met Lulu Royce only fleetingly, but he had sized her up instantly. Madigan would get from her exactly what Lulu wanted to tell him. Nothing more. But Madigan would be occupied for awhile. At the moment he was one step ahead of Johnny; Johnny had to pass him.

Madigan gathered up the books and took them back to the desk. He walked with Johnny and Sam to the outside door of the library. "Which way are you going, fellows?"

"Back to our hotel, I guess," Johnny said. "It looks like it's going to rain and we got a couple of raincoats or something there."

He did go back to the hotel with Sam, but they remained in their room only long enough to pick up their rather ancient raincoats.

With the coat over his arm, Johnny hesitated.

Finally he nodded. "Put on your raincoat, Sam, and turn down the brim of your hat. And scowl. Fine! Now, you look just like a flatfoot. Keep your mouth shut and whenever I look at you, grunt."

"Who you going to razzle-dazzle?"

"Mr. Tommy Johnson, down on the seventh floor. I'm awfully curious about him. Why he's got the key to Jill Thayer's room, when her boy-friend is supposed to be Ken Ballinger."

"Gosh, I wouldn't have thought it of her."

"Neither would I. So—scowl!"

## XI

THEY descended to the seventh floor and moved upon Room 717. Johnny beat a tattoo upon the door. There was no response and he gave the door another massage.

It was opened a few inches by Tom Johnson. Sam Cragg shoved both the door and Tom Johnson and they crowded into the room. Johnson's sullen face showed alarm.

"Hey, what's the idea?"

"Your name Tom Johnson?" Johnny asked curtly.

"Yes, but who're you?"

Johnny looked at Sam and the latter scowled fiercely. Johnny said, "Where're you from and how long've you lived at this hotel?"

"I've been here about three weeks. My home's in Iowa."

"Why'd you come to New York?"

"Why does anybody come? To get a job."

"Aren't there any jobs in Iowa?"

Johnson made an impatient gesture. "Not my kind. I'm an artist. Cartoonist."

Johnny looked around the room. "Where's your drawing board?"

"Haven't got one with me. I'm trying to get a job with a magazine. But look, you're the fellow was in Jill's room last night. I don't believe you're a—"

"What were *you* doing in her room?" Johnny snapped.

"Nothing. Jill's a friend of mine. I told her about you and she said that you weren't a policeman."

Johnny looked at Sam and the latter produced a ferocious scowl and a loud grunt. "Miss Thayer said that? Do you know the jam she's in herself?"

"She isn't in any jam," Johnson replied, with heat. "And I don't see what right you have asking me questions."

"A man was murdered in this hotel yesterday. We're asking everybody questions."

"By what right? Jill said you weren't a policeman. "

"No? And what do you think he (pointing at Sam) is?"

The door behind Johnny was slammed violently open and Jill Thayer, her eyes blazing, came into the room. "He's a thick-headed stumblebum, that's what he is. And you, Johnny Fletcher, you're an insolent, snooping busybody. I'm telling you for the last time to keep out of my affairs."

Tom Johnson took a quick step forward, cocking his right fist. "So you're not a cop, eh? Well, then—" He let fly with the fist. Johnny tried to duck and bumped into Jill Thayer. The fist caught him high on the forehead.

He grunted and lowering his head, stepped in. But he was too late. Sam Cragg had caught up young Tom Johnson and threw him six feet on to the bed. Then he brushed his hands.

"Okay, Johnny."

Johnny looked at Jill Thayer. Her face was cold. He shrugged and stepped past her. He walked to the elevator, Sam following. As they stood waiting, Johnny shot a quick glance at the door of Room 717. The door was closed.

He inhaled deeply and stepping forward, tried the doorknob. The door opened. He stuck in his head and pulled it out quickly.

"What's the idea?" Sam asked.

"Just wanted to see if she got rid of Ballinger. She did."

The elevator door opened and they stepped in. As they reached the lobby Johnny took a pamphlet from his raincoat pocket. It was a sixteen-page booklet with the title, *National Bookhunter.*

"Where'd you get that?" Sam exclaimed.

"Oh, just picked it up." They reached the door and Johnny looked out into a heavy drizzle. He pressed the booklet together, then let it fall open. It had been creased back between pages six and seven.

He looked at the pages. There was a heading at the top of each: "Books wanted" and the text consisted of dealers' listings. There were four groups of listings on page six, two on seven.

All but six of the listings were from dealers out of New York City. The address of the first in New York City was down in Greenwich Village. But the other was on West 40th Street. The listing read:

*Hochmeyer's Book Shop, West 40th Street, New York City*

Brower. Self Help in Piano Study
Bosworth. Geology of the Mid-Continent Oil Field
Birth, J. H. Safety Match
Lyman. Ralston's Ring
Shell Rock Iowa Hi-Way, June 1932 (A school paper)

"What is it?" Sam Cragg asked.

"A trade journal; for rare book dealers, I guess. Come on, the rain won't hurt us."

Johnny stepped out into the drizzle. They walked to Broadway and turned south. At Times Square they crossed to Seventh and continued on it to 40th, where they turned right. A hundred feet from the corner they came to a long, narrow book shop. "This is it," said Johnny.

They went into the store. In front was a table on which several hundred books were being offered at three for a dollar. Shelves lined both sides of the room, but

very few of the books on them were new.

There were no customers in the place. Halfway down the room an incredibly fat man sat behind a desk reading a volume of Swinburne's poems.

Johnny said, "Mr. Hochmeyer?"

"Yes," wheezed the fat man, "but just look around. If you see anything you like ask the price."

"Swell, but you may not have what I'm looking for."

"What is it?"

"A high school paper printed about ten years ago."

Hochmeyer lowered his volume of poetry and looked from Johnny Fletcher to Sam Cragg. "I see. Would it be the Shell Rock, Iowa, High School paper?"

"That's right."

"Well, what about it?"

"That's what I was going to ask you. According to this copy of *The National Bookhunter,* you've been advertising for that school paper?"

"That's right. I ran the ad four times."

"And did it bring results?"

"Yes."

"You got a copy of the paper?"

"Yes."

Johnny cleared his throat. "Who ordered it? What was the name of the person?"

The fat bookdealer cleared his throat. "I run a legitimate business here. If people want rare and out-of-print books and publications I try to get them for them. I don't ask for their pedigree. The man who asked me to get him that paper gave the name of Egbert Craddock and that's all I know about him."

"But you can describe him, can't you?"

"I'm not very good at that sort of thing. Not observant of people. He was about medium height I'd say, medium weight. Maybe forty or forty-five."

"But he gave you an address, didn't he?"

"The Turco Building."

"Not bad," said Johnny. "For a man who isn't observant you certainly remember a lot of things about a minor business transaction."

"Oh, I have special occasion to remember this. I looked it all up just an hour ago."

"Eh? How come?"

"The other detective—the tall thin one with the walrus mustache—"

"Jefferson Todd!" cried Sam Cragg.

"I'll be damned," Johnny swore. "You told him everything?"

"Just what I've told you. He had a picture of this Craddock, who I understand was murdered yesterday. Odd, I only gave him the paper yesterday morning. It was a hard item to get. People don't save their high school papers and in an obscure place like that you don't find anyone who reads the book trade journals. Matter of fact I had to buy it through another dealer. Ran the price up pretty high."

"How much?"

"Seventy-five dollars. That's what I had to charge Craddock. Naturally I have to make a profit on a transaction. The Waterloo dealer probably paid twenty-five for it."

"Did you give his name to this skinny dick?"

"Yes. It's Langford. Quite a reliable dealer. Has a good rating." Hochmeyer picked up his Swinburne. "If there's anything else—"

"I guess that about covers the subject."

Johnny sighed and left the store with Sam. It had stopped raining, but the sidewalks were still wet. "Either I'm awfully dumb on this business," Johnny groused to Sam, "or these other birds are getting inside information."

"From who?"

"Royce — Hale — Ballinger; they all knew Craddock. Even Murphy."

"Yeah, but how'd the kid—Johnson—get into this?"

"He comes from Iowa. Maybe he went to the Shell Rock High School."

"Then he ought to know about the paper!"

"Maybe yes, maybe no. I think I ought to have another talk with the boy, but I'm afraid he's anti-social by this time."

"I could make him talk."

Johnny shook his head. They had reached Times Square. Johnny looked east up 42nd, scowling. Then finally he shrugged and turned north to cross the street.

## XII

AN AUTOMOBILE horn beeped and Johnny made a frantic leap to escape. He reached the sidewalk in two jumps, missed and sprawled headlong on the concrete. He didn't hear the rip, but the cold wet pavement touching his entire right thigh caused him to scramble up.

He howled in chagrin, for his trousers leg was slit from the thigh to below the knee.

"Holy Cow!" Sam Cragg cried when he saw the gash.

"There ought to be a law against taxicabs," Johnny said bitterly. "The so-and-so didn't even stop, and now what am I going to do? This suit's absolutely ruined."

"Gee, Mister, that's tough," sympathized a passerby.

Johnny shot a quick glance around and saw that a dozen people had already congregated. "Beat it," he snarled, "whaddya think this is, a free cooch show?"

He turned and stalked across the street, wrapping the raincoat around him. Sam followed. "There's a tailor on 44th Street," he said.

"He couldn't fix this suit. And look at the mud. I've got to get a new suit—or at least a pair of pants that will match the coat reasonably. It'll have to be second-hand because the coat's pretty well along. I'll—" He stopped and stared at the Times Building.

Then suddenly he began to whistle softly. "I wonder if I can get away with it. Mmm, the pants are ruined so I can't lose anything by trying. Yeah—Peabody's been too doggone smug lately, anyway."

A worried look came to Sam's face. "What're you scheming, Johnny? You've got that look—cripes, don't do anything to get us in Dutch."

"I need a new suit," Johnny said doggedly. "And I'm going to get it. Come on!" He led Sam into the Times Building and down to the subway station. Passing through the turnstiles they entered the washroom, where Johnny slipped off his raincoat and removed his trousers. He emptied the pockets, putting the stuff into his coat pockets. Sam watched him anxiously. When Johnny began ripping the ruined pair of trousers below the knees, he cried out in chagrin.

"What're you doing, Johnny?"

Johnny finished ripping off one trouser leg and coolly started on the second. "They are no good the way they are, are they?" With a savage jerk he ripped off the second trouser leg. He punched a hole in the top of each foot-long section of trouser leg. He then tore a handkerchief into narrow strips and tying a couple of sections together fastened one end of the manufactured cord to the trouser leg and the other to his suspenders.

Then he pulled both trouser legs over his feet and put on his raincoat. Buttoning it tightly he straightened. "How does it look, Sammy?" he asked.

"All right," said Sam, dubiously, "but if your coat happens to flap open . . ."

"I'll see that it doesn't. All right, now come on."

"You're going out on the street that way?"

"It isn't windy, is it?"

"No, but—" Sam groaned. "All right, but if the cops grab you I'm not with you."

THEY left the subway station and then climbed up to Times Square. "Now, here's what you do, Sam," Johnny explained as they walked toward 45th Street. "When we get into the hotel lobby you go up to the desk and stay there in full sight.

If Eddie Miller's around, chew the rag with him. You need an absolutely air-tight alibi—"

"What for?" cried Sam, in alarm. "What're you going to pull?"

"You'll see. The less you know about it, the more surprised you'll be. Just remember, don't get out of sight for a single instant."

They turned into Forty-fifth Street and approached the hotel. As they entered Johnny exclaimed softly. "There's Peabody, stick with him— Afternoon, Mr. Peabody, a little damp outside, isn't it?"

Peabody sniffed. "You can expect it to be damp, when it's raining."

"Quite so, quite so. Well, I guess I'll run up and take a hot bath." Leaving Sam with Peabody, Johnny stepped into an elevator.

Sam Cragg cleared his throat. "Look, Mr. Peabody, did I ever tell you about the dog farm I inherited out in Missouri?"*

"No," said Mr. Peabody. "But I don't imagine it amounted to so very much—"

"Ah, but that's where you're wrong, Mr. Peabody. There was two hundred of the finest St. Bernard dogs you ever saw in your life. And a beautiful forty acre farm with a swell house on it. Boy, it certainly looked good when I first saw it—"

"Then why didn't you stay out there?"

"Because the dogs ate too much. Imagine! Two hundred pooches and each of them eating five pounds of food a day —a half ton."

"You must tell me about it some time— when I've nothing else to do. If you'll excuse me, now . . ."

"Wait a minute," Sam cried, desperately. "I want to ask you something."

"Yes?"

"Uh, it's something important. Well, not exactly important."

"No."

"Huh? Whaddya mean, no? You don't know yet what I'm going to ask, do yuh? It's, uh, about, well, about—"

"Mr. Peabody," called the desk clerk. "Will you take this call please? It's— Mr. Fletcher in Room 821."

Peabody looked coldly at Sam Cragg and sniffed. "Tell him I'm busy," he said to the clerk.

The latter shook his head. "I think you'd better talk to him, Mr. Peabody. He's quite irate. Says someone's stolen his trousers."

"What?" Peabody blinked, then took a quick step to the desk and scooped up the phone. "What nonsense is this now, Fletcher?" he cried. "What— That's ridiculous. No! Please—I won't stand for that. Don't you dare do that. I'll have you arrested. No, no! I'll come right up!"

Mr. Peabody slammed the receiver on the hook and turned a distorted face to Sam Cragg. "That partner of yours! I'll —I'll throw him out of the hotel."

"You and who else?" Sam challenged truculently.

Peabody wheeled and signaled to Eddie Miller. "Eddie come with me. And you, too, Cragg."

"What's the matter with you?" Sam snapped. "Have you gone nuts?"

"No, but Fletcher—ahrr! Eddie, when we get upstairs I want you to stand by the door and see that nothing is taken out —nothing, understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Peabody," Eddie Miller said meekly. Then catching Sam's eye he winked.

They stepped out of the elevator and moved in a body to the door of Room 821. "All right, Eddie!" Peabody said sharply. He reached out and pounded on the door of the room.

It was jerked open instantly by Johnny Fletcher. Johnny was wearing striped shorts and a shirt. His hair was wet and moisture still glistened on his face.

"What kind of a hotel is this, Peabody?" he cried. "A man steps into the bathroom to take a bath and when he comes out some pants burglar has entered

* The Hungry Dog, published 1941.

his room and stolen his pants. What've you got here—a den of thieves?"

"Mr. Fletcher," said Peabody, his nostrils flaring. "Please lower your voice. There are other guests in this hotel—"

"Robbers!" Johnny roared.

"No one stole your trousers," Peabody said coldly. "You've mislaid them—and if I find them, you'll be sorry."

"Go ahead and find them!"

"I will!"

Peabody entered the room, took a quick glance into the bathroom and then headed straight for the window. He poked out his head and looked down into the courtyard eight floors below. When he pulled in his head he was biting his lips.

He got down on his hands and knees and looked under the bed. Then he tried the big trunk and the single clothes closet. Finally he ripped the bed apart and raised the mattress.

By that time he was beginning to perspire. "They must be here, Fletcher," he said angrily. "You've hidden them somewhere."

"Do I look crazy? Why would I hide them? Hey—wait a minute. I had some money—"

"No," screamed Peabody. "Don't start that. The hotel's not responsible for money.

There's a sign on the back of every door says you've got to check valuables downstairs."

"Pants, too?" Johnny scooped up his coat and plunged his hand into the side pocket. Then he grunted. "My money's here. Lucky for you. But what about my pants?"

Peabody gritted his teeth and got down on all fours and began patting the rug to make sure there were no lumps in it. He went into the bathroom, came out and began searching the room again. But he couldn't find Johnny's trousers.

And at last he gave up.

"All right, they're not here," he conceded. "I'm sorry, but that's all there's to it."

"What am I going to do?" Johnny cried. "They were the only pair of pants I owned. You think I'm a millionaire that I own two suits? It's your fault that you allow thieves in this hotel and I tell you I'm holding you responsible—"

Peabody brushed his hands together. "I'm sorry, but the hotel is *not* responsible."

"The hell it isn't. I'll sue you—"

"For a five dollar pair of trousers? Don't be absurd."

"Five dollar hell. That suit was worth seventy-five dollars and the coat's no good without the pants."

"You can buy a pair that'll match reasonably close."

"How? I haven't got any pants to wear."

"Sam Cragg can go out and get you some."

"Yeah, sure, Johnny," Sam volunteered.

"No," Johnny said. "Sam can't go out and get me a pair of pants. He can't because I won't let him. It's the hotel's fault that my pants were stolen and I won't leave this room until I get a new suit."

Peabody snickered. "You'll get hungry after awhile." He went to the door.

"On second thought," Johnny said grimly. "I'm going down to the lobby right now—like this."

"You wouldn't dare. I'll have you arrested!"

"Do that," Johnny snapped. "Fetch in the cops. They'll have to take me down to the station like I am—and if you think the newspaper boys won't see a story in that you've got another think coming. It'll look good in the papers—'Guest's pants robbed by burglar at 45th Street Hotel'—"

Peabody clapped his hand to his forehead. "Oh, what did I ever do to earn this? Why do you come to this hotel, Fletcher? It's such a peaceful place when you're not here."

"There's a draft here with that door open," Johnny said. "I think I'll go down to the lobby—"

"Don't you dare!"

Johnny brushed Peabody aside and stepped into the hall. Miller regarded him with tongue in cheek. Johnny pushed the elevator button. "Going down!"

Peabody hurtled out of the room and grabbed Johnny by the arm. "Please, Fletcher, you can't—"

"Do I get a new suit?"

"Well—a new pair of pants—"

"No, whole suit or nothing. Going down—"

The red light showed overhead and Peabody tugged frantically on Johnny's arm. "All right, all right—"

"Sam! You know my size. Don't take too long. I'll wait a half hour and if the suit isn't here by then I'm coming down to the lobby—"

The elevator door began to open and Johnny leaped back into his room. It was well that he did, for there were two women in the elevator.

Down in the lobby, Peabody took a card from his pocket and wrote on it. "Take this to Hahn's where I buy my own suits. It's right on the corner. And remember—twenty-five dollars is the limit."

"Twenty-five?" Sam asked. "You can't get much of a suit for twenty-five bucks."

"That's all I pay for my own. If it's good enough for me—"

"It ain't good enough for Johnny! Maybe I better go and tell him what you said."

"No! All right, go up to thirty-two fifty. But that's the absolute limit."

"Okay, pal," Sam Cragg said, "but I don't think Johnny'll like it."

He put the card into his pocket and walked to Hahn's big store on Broadway. "I want to get a nifty suit for a pal of mine," Sam told the clerk. "He's five feet ten inches tall and weighs a hun'ert and seventy. He's pretty big in the shoulders for a skinny guy."

"About a thirty-six, I'd say," said the clerk. "Now, here's a nice piece of material."

"Nah, it's too gloomy looking. Haven't you got something with some snap?"

"Snap, eh? Step over here, please. Now, here's a nice British lounge model. Perhaps a trifle, ah, too vivid?"

"Whaddya mean vivid? I want something snappy."

The half hour was just about up when Sam Cragg opened the door of Room 821 and found Johnny dressed in shirts and shorts stretched out on one of the twin beds.

"Ah, you got it," Johnny exclaimed, getting up. "I hope you selected something good."

"I bought a pip," Sam replied. "Peabody said I couldn't go over thirty-two fifty, but I hiked it up to forty bucks and got the swellest suit in the store. Look!" He broke the string of the parcel and reaching in produced the coat.

"Ohmigawd!" cried Johnny in horror.

"Like it? I thought you would."

"Take it back," Johnny howled. "I wouldn't wear that to a Harlem cockfight. Jumping Joe Johnston, you could hear that suit eight miles away, it's so loud."

SAM looked injured. "Loud? I think it's kinda snappy. These plaid checks are the very latest the clerk said. Gosh, I'd like a suit like that myself."

"Take it back, it's hurting my eyes. Get me something I can wear down the street

without having everyone look at me."

Sam sighed wearily and put the suit back into the box. He rode down in the elevator and encountered Peabody in the lobby. The latter stared hard at the suit box. "What's the matter, is he finicky about the fit?"

"No, I guess it fits all right, but he thought it was maybe a little too loud."

"I didn't think they came too loud for him. Let me see it." Peabody twisted up a corner of the box and peered in. Then he exclaimed and tugged the coat out of the box. He held it up before him and cried out in triumph. "Ha! So he wants to exchange it, does he? Well, I'm stepping right to the telephone the moment you leave and I'm telling Hahn's not to make the exchange. A suit he wanted and he got. I didn't guarantee the color. Let him wear this; it'll teach him a lesson."

"You mean you won't let them exchange the suit?"

"That's exactly what I said."

"But this suit cost forty bucks. Maybe I can exchange it for one for less money?"

Greed struggled with revenge on Peabody's face, then revenge won. He shook his head. "No, it'll be worth it to see him wear that suit. Take it up to him. I wash my hands of the whole matter. He's got the suit, now let him wear it."

Sam returned to Room 821. "Peabody says it's no dice on the exchange. He won't let the store do it."

A glint came to Johnny's eyes. "Okay," he said. "I didn't think the worm had it in him. All right, I'll wear the horse blanket and I hope Peabody's eyes hurt him every time he looks at me."

HE PUT on the suit and looked at himself in the mirror, wincing.

"It's a swell fit," said Sam Cragg. "By the way, Johnny, how'd you ever get rid of the pants legs?"

"Tore them in pieces and flushed them down the toilet bowl. I hope the pipes get clogged up somewhere. Well, let's go and see if any dogs bark at me."

As he opened the door, Eddie Miller fell in, landing on his hands and knees. He picked himself up, grinning ruefully.

"I was just going to knock."

"I'll bet you were. Did you ever get a hatpin stuck into your eye, through a keyhole?"

"Women don't wear hatpins anymore —I was bringing up this telephone slip. You got a call while you were out." He thrust a slip of paper at Johnny.

Johnny read: "Mr. Royce telephoned. He wants you to come to his apartment at five o'clock."

"It's four-thirty now," said Eddie Miller. "Thought you'd want to know."

"Thanks, Eddie. Remind me to give you a dime sometime."

Eddie pretended to see Johnny's suit for the first time and held his hand up to his eyes, as if dazzled. "That's quite a suit," he said.

"Isn't it? I like snappy clothes. Well, don't put any Mickey Finns in the ice water, Eddie."

"I just remembered something I seen yesterday, Mr. Fletcher. I don't think you'd be interested in it, but your friend, Lieutenant Madigan, might be glad if you'd tip him off. I know you're not working on the case yourself—"

Johnny looked sharply at Eddie. "What is it?"

"Oh, I guess it's not really so *very* important. It's about this fella who got bumped yesterday."

"Do I have to choke it out of you?"

Eddie smirked. "Maybe I don't remember it so well, after all."

Johnny scowled at Eddie and took a dollar from his pocket. Eddie looked at the money without much interest. Johnny added another dollar.

Eddie said, "It's beginning to come now. If you could refresh my memory a little stronger—"

"I'm curious only two dollars' worth.

Madigan wouldn't pay you anything."

Eddie took the money and stowed it away.

"I was taking a guest up to the seventh floor and I saw this Soderstrom going into Room 717. Johnson was with him."

"Yes?"

"That's all. They closed the door. It was right before I went out for lunch—and I eat at twelve. The papers said he must have been killed about that time."

Johnny nodded thoughtfully. "Did you see Soderstrom at the hotel before yesterday?"

"Oh sure, he came here once or twice a week. Usually with Ken Ballinger. I didn't know his name, but I knew him by sight."

"Thank you, my boy, thank you. Keep that information under your hat and I may throw you another bone or two."

Eddie Miller grinned and departed. Johnny and Sam followed immediately, riding down in the elevator with the bellboy. Down in the lobby, they started toward the door just as Jefferson Todd, still wearing his disguise, came in.

Johnny groaned. "What brings you here, Jeff?"

"You asked me to come at five. Don't you remember?"

"Yeah sure, but I forgot I have an appointment. Couldn't you make it later?"

"No, I'm hot on something. I just wanted to ask you a question or two about Dan Murphy."

"You can find him at the Pom Pom Burlesque House on 42nd."

"I know. I was there. He said you'd been there."

"Oh, so I beat you there. I understand you're interested in rare books."

"What? You're working on that angle? Look, let's talk this over."

"Can't. I told you I've got a date."

"So have I. With Lulu Royce. But it can wait. This—"

"Sorry," said Johnny, brushing past Jeff. "My date can't wait."

He hurried out of the hotel, Sam blocking interference. At the curb, Johnny signaled to a taxicab. As he and Sam Cragg climbed in, Jefferson Todd attempted to follow. "We can talk in the cab—"

"Can't you take a hint?" Sam growled. "We don't want you, see?"

He put his big hand on Jeff Todd's chest and pushed him back.

As the cab started off, Johnny gave the address of Matt Royce's East River apartment and fifteen minutes later they were riding up in the elevator.

They got off the elevator at the top floor and climbed the flight to the penthouse, where Johnny rang the doorbell.

There was no response and he rang a couple of times more. At last he tried the door. It was open. The moment he stepped inside a premonition of disaster swept over him.

"Easy, Sam," he said, sharply. "Don't touch anything."

"Nobody's home," Sam said. "Lulu must have fired all the help before she went."

"Probably. Make it tough for Matty to get new help. But why'd he call me if he wasn't going to be here?" They walked through the big room where the party had been held the night before. Johnny hesitated a moment before the bedroom door, then pushed it open.

Matt Royce was lying on the thick rug. His eyes were glassy, his mouth was open. He was dead.

(*Part III in the next* SHORT STORIES)

# RAT FEATHERS

***Tuck Mullins Could Put on an Act as Well as Boss a Shooting Crew***

## By J.-J. des ORMEAUX

IT WAS ten o'clock at night when Tuck Mullins and his shooting crew, having made heavy going through the log roads, cutbacks, slash, longleaf and lolly of the piney woods section of mid-Texas, pulled into the unincorporated hamlet of West Auck. It was raining cats and dogs. Out from under the tarpaulins of the four trucks, like woodchucks from their holes, the heads of Ace, Blondie, Cockeyes, Baptiste, the dog, faced Cajan, all the major and minor luminaries of the San Rio Exploration Company's dynamite crew, emerged to look sourly around. They were cramped, stiff and cantankerous. They had come from deep Louisiana in a single haul, six hundred miles as a truck bumps, to fetch up at this dripping jewel of a metropolis in the fastness of the piney woods.

They took one look at West Auck and even forgot to cuss.

The place was a bedlam. Men splashed through the streets, overflowed the hotel, milled around in wet groups in store entrances, and sat on up-ended valises in hallways. From under the dripping tarpaulins, heads turned with one accord to Tuck Mullins.

"Where do we stay?"

"Don't worry," Tuck assured them, "I sent Swede on ahead to get us rooms."

In the last forty-eight hours West Auck had become the fever spot of the oil industry. A wildcat well a mile from town had suddenly come in at nine hundred feet with a tremendous flow of oil. It caught the industry flat-footed. They had never heard of West Auck, hadn't watched the well, and screamed with frenzy at the idea of

oil at nine hundred feet. Oil scouts, lease-hounds, geologists, royalty men, all the lions and jackals of the oil trade, grabbed up a hat and toothbrush and ran for West Auck. A shooting crew, which finds out the location of oil by shooting dynamite at the bottom of deep holes, and recording the sound waves on specialized seismographic instruments, has a lot of heavy equipment and can't grab a toothbrush and run. Consequently the ten o'clock on which Tuck Mullins' boys rolled into West Auck was ten o'clock of the second night.

"Here comes Swede now."

Out of the night, squelching in every joint and looking like a drowned otter, splashed the Swede. "There ain't nothin'!" he burst out. "Nothin'! Tuck, I scoured the joint. There's only two streets of houses, one going this way, one going that. They even got 'em piled crossways in the beds."

"Did you try the hotel?"

"A Luna crew is in there. McGrew's crew. They've been here two days. They've got the whole second floor."

Tuck gagged speechlessly. This, on top of the rain, was like the drink of hemlock to Socrates. The Luna was a rival company, and McGrew and his crew the San Rio boys' pet aversion. They had tangled before, in the bayou country of Louisiana, on the alkali flats of west Texas; a special and malignant fate always seemed to send the two crews to work the identical area. That McGrew and his Luna bib-dribblers should be ensconced in snug comfort on the whole second floor of the hotel seemed more than human endurance could bear.

"Looks like we sleep in the trucks," Swede dolefully observed.

"Trucks, baloney," said Tuck. He sat rubbing his green-eyed homely face. He was getting one of those brilliant ideas, those fireballs out of nowhere, that so often went out in a magnificent parabola and boomeranged to hit him between the eyes.

He turned to Ace. "What's the name of that Luna vice-president in Houston?" he asked. "Eggleston? Isn't that it?"

"Yeah, that's it."

"Listen," said Tuck to Swede, "you go in and make reservations for any vacant space the hotel is going to have. The rest of you pile over there. When anybody comes out, you go in."

"What are you going to do?"

"Taking a kyack to Nyack," said Tuck.

He drove twenty miles hell-for-leather straight east down the highway to Leiperville, the county seat. Here he changed a quarter into nickels and long-distanced the hotel at West Auck.

"Let me talk to McGrew."

"Mr. McGrew is not here."

"Then get me the next in charge. Step on it. This is the head office in Houston."

After some moments a sleepy voice said, "This is Horlick. What is it?"

"What kind of an outfit is this?" bawled Tuck. "Where's McGrew? Why isn't he around at this time of night?"

"He's out on business. Who's this?"

"This is Eggleston."

"Oh—Oh!" said Horlick, with an enormous shift to realization and respect. "Oh, yes, Mr. Eggleston."

"Get this, Horlick," said Tuck. "You're in charge from now on. Miss Hemingway, make a note of that, from now on Horlick is chief of crew No. 3. Now get this, Horlick. Yank your crew out of there. The break's come at Leiperville. Get over there. Get over there right now."

"Now? You mean now? Judas, we just got to bed!"

"Bed! Bed!" bawled Tuck. "Do you think the oil industry's going to sit around sucking its thumb while you go to bed? Get over to Leiperville! I'm flying there myself! Step on it. Get the lead out of your pants!"

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir."

TUCK drove back in cheerful relaxation toward West Auck. A short way out of town his headlights picked up what

he thought was a wounded buck staggering around in the road. He pulled up and saw an old farmer in a slouch hat weaving a bibulous progress toward town.

"Hey, there, want a lift?"

"Thank yuh kindly." The old fellow dumped a quart of water off the brim of the slouch hat, squeezed another pint out of a mustache the size of a janitor's brush, and rolled a red-rimmed merry eye at Tuck. "Mite dampish this evenin'. You one o' these here oil men?"

"That's right."

"Shake the hand of Pop Brewster. I sho' feel a passel of gratitude toward you fellers."

Tuck shook the gnarled paw and looked into the beaming eyes. "You mean you own land around here?"

"Suh," declared the old fellow impressively, "for nigh on forty years I been scratchin' for corn and taters on a doglaig of forty acres. All I asked of that doglaig was two things. One was to p'vide my little gal with an eddication and the other was to leave a mite over for me for corn likker. That doglaig never would cooperate. I had to give up one or t'other, and I ain't had a drink of likker in twenty years. Well, suh, do you know where that ornery doglaig is? It's five hundred feet from that wildcat well!"

Tuck's eyes grew round. "Five hundred feet! You've really got cause to celebrate."

Pop Brewster blew his nose triumphantly out the car window. "You behold, suh, a millionaire about to get into his stride.

"I'm a-meetin' the feller at the Buckhorn Bar that's tooken care of everything. An' the best part of it is, my little gal's a-comin' home and don't know a thing about it!" He slapped Tuck between the shoulder blades. "Cain't yuh jest see her eyes a-bungin' out?"

"Sure can."

"That there's the Buckhorn. Or, lemme see. Wait'll it settles down. Yessuh, that's it. Sho' appreciate the lift. Any time Pop Brewster can do you a favor, jest say the word."

"Sure will, Pop." Tuck let him out at the Buckhorn, where he rolled toward the double doors like a frigate in a heavy sea.

Back at the hotel Tuck found his boys in uproarious spirits heaving their duffel into the rooms on the second floor. "How'd you do it?" demanded Swede, his flat face open in astonishment. "Them Luna boys piled out of here so fast they even left two pairs of McGrew's pants!"

"Did you save a room for Clapper?" asked Tuck.

"Yeah, sure, the front one."

Clapper was a big shot from the San Rio who was driving up from Houston to oversee this play. When he arrived, some quarter of an hour later, he was deeply impressed at having a private room, having seen the swarming overflow in the streets.

"Splendid, splendid, Mullins," he said. "I don't see how you managed it. I must commend your diligence and foresight."

"Oh, it's nothing," said Tuck modestly.

CLAPPER unrolled some land maps and spread them out. "We've got a tough problem, Mullins. Luna got the jump on us and leased practically everything around the well, including the well tract itself. Now what we've got to get, in order to see if any of the unleased stuff is any good, is a shot as close as possible to the well."

A 'shot' meant the drilling of a twenty or thirty-foot hole, exploding a charge of dynamite at the bottom of it, and recording the explosion, with its deep echoes from the oil-bearing strata, on the instruments in the seismograph truck.

"Naturally, Luna won't let us on their lease," said Clapper. "They've got McGrew out here to do their own shooting for them, and to keep an eye on their holdings. How the devil are we going to get a shot near that well?"

They pored over the map. The land around the well was a hodgepodge of small

tracts, and everything seemed to be marked 'Luna Lease.' And being old hands at this game, they would have watchmen out there with their eyes peeled. It seemed a manifest impossibility.

Tuck, who was pulling his lip, let it snap back suddenly. "Wait a minute. I gave a lift to an old fellow named Brewster tonight. He said he owned a dogleg close to the well." His finger jockeyed over the map. "Here it is! Five hundred feet away! How's that?"

"You mean you can shoot there?"

"Sure, sure. He said if he could do me a favor, just let him know."

"Marvelous!" said Clapper, rubbing his hands. "You've solved my knottiest problem. You can get that shot first thing in the morning, Tucker, my boy."

On the strength of 'Tucker, my boy,' which might be good for a ten-dollar raise, Tuck started a poker game in his room and had lost eleven dollars when the telephone rang.

He picked up the receiver. "Yeah?"

"Hey, Horlick, this is McGrew," said a rasping voice.

Tuck coveted the phone and said, "It's McGrew. He's back. He thinks I'm his roommate. He doesn't know his crew's pulled out."

"Listen," said McGrew through the phone, "do you know what I did with the hundred dollars? I got the acreage. I got it by proxy. By proxy, see? Boy, that covers me like a blanket. I got an old skunk named Taylor to front for me."

"Think of that," said Tuck. "An old skunk fronting for a young skunk, eh?"

"Hey, who is this?" bawled McGrew.

"Why, darling, don't you know me? This is Gypsy Rose Lee."

The phone slammed up and after a short interval there came a hammering at the door. Ace got up and opened it.

McGrew was a large and beefy man with a naturally rosy pink skin, which, as in many men of that complexion, was startlingly combined with a blue-black jaw. The latter slowly descended until it almost unhinged itself.

"What are you doing in here?"

"Just threading a few ribbons through our camisoles," said Tuck.

"Just trying on a couple pairs of your pants," said Cockeyes.

McGrew took two steps in two different directions.

"Where's my crew?" he roared.

"Why, McGrew," said Tuck, "you know you shouldn't go away and leave those little darlings to themselves. We heard they ran away because you didn't tell them a bedtime story."

McGrew whirled toward the hall so suddenly he nearly tore the door jamb off with his face. They heard him banging at doors up and down the hall, and the raucous and ribald greetings he got in reply.

He came back into Tuck's room. His face was the color of boiling beef. His neck bulged and his eyes protruded like the eyes of a telescopic goldfish.

"Where are they?" he yelled. "Where are they?"

"Seems to me," said Tuck, wrinkling his brows reflectively at Swede, "I heard 'em say there was a hotel at Leiperville where they warmed the milk."

"Leiperville!" bawled McGrew. "Leiperville!" He started for Tuck, thought better of it, and retreated to the door again. "You did this! You got 'em out of here. I don't know how you did it. I'll get even with you for this. So help me, I'll square it with you."

"By proxy, McGrew?"

"Hey, don't forget your pants!"

IN THE morning, fresh and rested, the San Rio boys rolled out of West Auck in the sparkling sunshine. The trucks bowled along in file, the half-ton pickup leading with Tuck and Blondie in the cab, then Swede and Cockeyes in the seismograph truck, next the dynamite truck with Ace and his helpers, and finally dog-faced Baptiste and his beefy Cajans who manned

the ton and a half holedrilling truck. There was a spicy smell from dogwood and loblolly, last night's raindrops sparkled like diamonds among the leaves, and razorbacks fought, scampered and rooted among the pines. The dogleg of forty acres turned out to have a lane going up it, with a little white house poking among chinaberry trees. Tuck parked the crew in the lane and walked on up. The house had a trellised porch with morning-glories climbing over it.

The front door opened and a girl came out on the porch.

TUCK drew an appreciative breath. She was small and slim with sparkling brown eyes, and blonde as an autumn sycamore.

"Good morning," said Tuck with his smoothest smile. "My name is Mullins. I had the pleasure of talking to your father last night."

The girl reached behind the trellis and took out a shotgun.

"So you're the one, are you?" she said. "So you're the one that got him to sign that! I'll—"

"Hey, wait a minute—"

"Stand where you are. Don't try to run. If you make a move I'll give you both barrels."

She meant it, too. Her small face was tight and set, and the sparkle in her brown eyes was fury.

"Dad!" she shouted. "Come out here!"

There was an indistinct noise inside and Pop Brewster stumbled out on the porch. No longer were the red-rimmed eyes merry. They were still red-rimmed; in fact they seemed to consist of nothing but rims. The rest of them seemed to have disappeared into his cheeks like butter into Parkerhouse rolls. His mustache hung tangled like a catbird's nest and his hair draggled lankly all one way, as if he had just taken his head out of a bucket of well water.

"Is this the one?" the girl demanded.

Pop did his best to focus his bleary gaze on Tuck.

"You remember me, don't you, Mr. Brewster? I gave you a lift last night."

Pop opened his mouth and a cracked squeak came out of it. "This ain't the one, Sally. This here's a right nice feller that druv me to town."

"What happened, Mr. Brewster?"

"Some swindling robber got him to deed over his mineral rights!" cried the girl.

"Mineral rights!" said Tuck. "Mineral rights!"

"Yes, for a hundred dollars!"

Tuck stood open-mouthed. Mineral rights are something no one ever parts with, for they comprise the ownership of any valuable deposits under the ground, specifically and particularly including oil. A hundred dollars for his mineral rights! This was something that staggered the imagination; Tuck could only stand opening and closing his mouth.

"Who is he? Who'd you give 'em to?"

Pop Brewster put a handful of his mustache in his mouth and chewed it. "Don't rightly rec'lect. Name o' Johns or Johnson or somethin'. Seems like I had a mite o' likker aboard. Was such a friendly feller, jes' told me to call him George."

"What did you deed him your mineral rights for?"

"Said he had to have the rights to drill me a well."

"But you've lost everything! Any oil that's found here is his. It's not yours any more. It belongs to him."

The gun clattered to the porch and Sally burst out crying. Pop stood by miserably patting her shoulder. "Please, Sally, don't do that. Yo're breakin' my heart."

"Listen," said Tuck, "we've got to find out who this is. We've got to get that deed back!"

"Get it back!" sobbed Sally. "How can we get it back? We don't even know who he is. And you," she stormed, "what are you doing here? Likely you're mixed up in it too. What did you drive him to town

for? What did you come up here for? What are you doing around here?"

"Why, I just wanted to ask your permission to—"

"Are you one of those oil men?"

"Yes, but—"

"Get out of here," she blazed. "Get off this land! I'll shoot the next one of you thieving, swindling robbers I see inside our fence."

DOWN in the lane the crew were already heaving their gear out of the trucks.

"Get back in the trucks," said Tuck.

"Huh? You mean we ain't going to shoot here?"

"That's right." He got into the pickup and turned it around. It was a little too much, even for his elastic conscience, to sneak a shot on the Brewster land. Their situation, as far as he could see, was hopeless. This Johns or Johnson might be any of a hundred crooks and sharpshooters that had swarmed into West Auck. Since these sales were usually worded: "for one dollar and other valuable consideration," it could never be demonstrated that Pop Brewster had only been paid a hundred dollars for his rights. If the deed could be got hold of and destroyed, before it was recorded, then that would cancel the sale. But how could you get hold of a deed when you didn't know who had it?

Blondie sat staring at him. "Where are we going to shoot?"

"On the Luna lease, looks like."

Blondie rubbed his hands together. "Now you're talking."

Tuck signaled the crew to wait at the first crossroads. "We'll take a gander around," he told Blondie.

The tract containing the wildcat well was long and narrow, perhaps half a mile wide by three miles long, a rolling ribbon of pines with a truck road undulating down the center. Here, at the low end, they could see the well, its derrick empty now that drilling was completed, and a couple of watchmen lounging around the toolshed. On this side, about a stone's throw from the well, began a thick tangle of brush that ran all the way up to the Brewster fence.

"If only those watchmen weren't there," observed Blondie, "we could get a shot in that brush."

"Yeah." They continued the length of the tract, noting a couple of crosslanes intersecting the truck road, and, about a mile and a half from the well, the empty dynamite boxes and stove-in-holes that showed where McGrew's crew had finished working last night. There was no sign, however, of McGrew's crew. This gave Tuck his second brilliant idea.

"Listen," he said, "I'm going to take six of the boys, crawl through the fence, and put down a hole with hand augers in that brush."

"How about the watchmen?"

"They're going to be up at this end. You're going to take the other boys and drive in with the trucks by that first crosslane. You'll start work in the big middle of the Luna lease. When the watchmen come up, you're McGrew's crew. They don't think so, see, but this makes matter for argument, and while the pow-wow's going on, we get the hole in the brush loaded. Then I come up and yank you off, and we head for town. Only we don't go to town. We set the seismograph truck up just outside the fence, shoot the shot, and scram."

"Check," said Blondie.

They returned to the trucks and made a quick division of forces. Tuck took Swede, Ace, and the beefy holediggers, while Blondie took Baptiste, Cockeyes, and the two remaining helpers. This small force, Tuck impressed upon them, had to make enough noise for an entire crew. He watched them pull away with the trucks, and as soon as he heard their noisy entrance into the Luna lease, he drove the pickup truck with his own contingent by a circuitous course into the pines across the

road from the well. They unloaded the hand augers, dynamite, caps, wire and blaster, and filed through the trees to the road. There was a comforting racket from the middle of the Luna lease and no watchmen in sight.

They crawled through the fence and snaked into the brush. Here they could not be seen, but neither could they see anything. Tuck picked a spot as near as discretion permitted to the well.

"Hop to it."

For fifteen minutes the surreptitious and sweating labor went on, the boys twisting at the eight-inch bladed auger, attaching new joints of pipe as the hole went down, while Tuck and Swede rigged the dynamite sticks together in bundles of four. When the hole got to seventeen feet the clay they were going through turned to sand, and ten more minutes of heaving and wrenching failed to make any more progress.

"We'll load it," said Tuck.

Swede impaled the bundles of dynamite sticks on the end of his javelin-like loading-pole and with one motion rammed the charge to the bottom of the hole.

Ace chewed a callous off his thumb and spat it in the direction of the truck road. "Sure makin' a lot of racket over there."

"Yeah," said Tuck. The volume of the sound from the middle of the Luna lease had him a little worried. There was just too much noise. The intervening pines cut up the sound into vague booming echoes.

"All ready," said Swede.

The booming hubbub had suddenly and incomprehensibly died down.

They ran a pair of extension wires from the cap leads and set up the blaster outside the fence, where Swede could crouch unseen to detonate the shot. Tuck wasted no more time, but sprinted for the pickup. He zigzagged through the trees, reached the crosslane, and drove into the middle of the Luna lease. He braked up with his green eyes bulging.

There was nobody there. Nobody. There were no trucks. There was no crew. There were no watchmen. Around on the ground was an indistinguishable assortment of litter, including splinters from pick handles, squashed hats, trampled cigarettes, sleeves ripped off shirts, and what looked like a full set of teeth.

A STRANGE and brooding silence pervaded the scene, like the hanging stillness after a landslide.

Tuck climbed out and shouted, "Blondie! Blondie! Hey, gang, where are you?"

There was a plunging sound in the undergrowth to the left and out of it rolled dog-faced Baptiste. The stocky Cajan had no shirt or undershirt and only half a pair of pants. His face, which normally resembled something that looks out between the bars of a zoo, was now warted and studded with bumps like the bottom of a football shoe. He blew blood out of the flattened area that was his nose and wove uncertainly toward Tuck.

"Baptiste! What happened?"

*"Cré bleu!"* mumbled Baptiste. "Ees moch happen. Ees too moch. Ees not one, two watchmen. Ees ten, eleven. Ees weeth them thees beeg peenk skonk McGrew."

"McGrew!"

Baptiste wound up and groggily punched the air. "Ees beeg *bataille.* Ees magnifique. Blop! I heet! *Allons, enfants!* Blop. I get heet!" He shook his head sadly. "Ees ver' black for long time. Whan de sense, she return, thees *nigaud,* thees McGrew, who haf not joined ze *bataille,* ees come back weeth ze connestable."

"The constable!"

"Ah, c'est désolant," mourned Baptiste. "Ze connestable ees take Blondie and ze boys to jail."

Something indescribable occurred to Tuck's insides. His stomach stretched slowly downwards, like a rubber ball on a string, and then released to thud heavily against his diaphragm. Baptiste smeared the gore on his face around with his hand

and blinked at Tuck. "Bot de trocks!" he said. "De trocks! How ees we going to work weet no trocks? Tell me, Tuck, wat ees she mean, dees word 'eempound'?"

"Impound!"

"Zat ees wat ze connestable, he say he do weet our trocks!"

THE jail was a one-story brick building at the straggling end of West Auck. It had a high picket fence around it, and of all things to find growing inside the fence, a rose garden. The first thing Tuck saw when he charged through the gate were his trucks parked beside the jail. The next thing he saw was a lean man in galluses, with spectacles pushed up on his bald head, watering the roses with what looked like a fire hose.

"Hey, son, what's your hurry?"

"Where's the constable? Where's the constable?"

"I'm the constable."

At Tuck's voice a clamor rose inside the jail. "—It's Tuck!" "—Hey, Tuck, get us out of here!"

The constable snapped his galluses and hitched a thumb over his shoulder. "You a friend o' them fellers in there?"

"Yes. Listen, you can't hold them! You can't put them in jail. They haven't done anything."

The constable made a series of involved convolutions with his face and spat tobacco juice with great accuracy at a caterpillar. "T'ain't no use, son. I seen what they was up to. They had a truckful of dynamite and was fixin' to blow up that well." He wiped off his chin and said mildly, "You know that ain't no way to act."

"They weren't trying to blow up anything. They weren't even going to shoot the dynamite. They made a mistake. They were in the wrong place. They lost their bearings."

"Hm-mm," said the constable, "powerful queer way they had of findin' out their bearings. One o' them watchmen was ten minutes coughin' up a pivot tooth and the stem of a corncob pipe."

"But you've got to let me have the trucks. You can't hold the trucks!"

"No, son. Them trucks is evidence. There's hundreds of pounds of dynamite in one of 'em. I can't let you have neither trucks nor men, 'lessen you get a writ from Jedge Enderby over to the county courthouse, or 'lessen the plaintiff withdraws his charges."

"Who's the plaintiff?"

"Here he comes now."

Tuck turned and saw McGrew coming in the gate. The Luna crew chief's step was brisk, his beefy face pink as a baby's, and his jaw creased in a nasty smile. "Well, well, Tuck! Not trying to release those boys of yours, by any chance?"

Tuck felt as if he was strangling. "Tell this guy it was a mistake. Tell him it was a mistake!"

"Mistake?" said McGrew. "Why, you green-eyed louse, you know as well as I do what they were doing. I found that hole in the brush. Mistake! Ha! Ha! Ha! You can tell the judge that at their trial. When will that be, Constable?"

"Coupla weeks, most like," said the constable. "Doctor jest took a kidney out o' Jedge Enderby, and it kinda slowed him down."

"A couple of weeks!" roared McGrew. "Boy, I guess that settles for the hotel room business, eh?"

Tuck made a noise like a swarm of bees and jumped for him. The constable dropped the hose with surprising agility and tackled him around the legs. He and Tuck lay flat on the garden walk and looked at each other.

"Easy, son," said the constable. "You can't do nothin' thataway. Has to be legal and orderly, or I'll smack you in the calaboose too."

CLAPPER strode around the hotel room. His face was apoplectic. From time to time he whacked himself in the back of

the neck, with sufficient violence for a rabbit punch.

"Oh!" he said. "Why? Why? Why did you do it? Just tell me that. Why did you shoot on the Luna lease?"

Tuck sat and gnawed his knuckles, having chewed all his fingernails off. "I thought I could get away with it."

"Get away with it!" moaned Clapper. "Oh, the sublime, the superb, the ghastly selfassurance of it! You've cooked our goose. We're sunk. We can't shoot. We can't do anything. And this judge, this Enderby. Do you know who he is? He's the brother-in-law of the man that put down the wildcat well!"

Tuck groaned. He wondered if, in the continual whacking process, Clapper would by some happy chance break his neck. Clapper made a whirling motion and caught up his hat. "I'll have to see him. Maybe I can talk to him. Maybe I can bribe him. It's all I can do."

Tuck tailed along behind Clapper in the pickup with Swede and Ace. The journey to Leiperville was not remarkable for its conversation. In the courthouse the three waited outside the judge's chambers while Clapper went in. The roars that subsequently issued forth, less like a human being with one kidney than a tiger with three, made it fairly plain that Clapper was not making much headway. Swede and Ace went dismally back to the pickup. Tuck prowled around the courthouse, plunged in such funereal gloom that he almost collided with Sally without seeing her.

"What are you doing here?"

Sally looked very much as she had behind the shotgun. Her small face was set, her brown eyes enormous, and her mouth a tight line. She stopped as if she could not decide whether to slap him or speak to him.

"I've come to stop that man from recording the deed."

"Huh?" Intervening events had almost knocked the affair of the swindled mineral rights out of Tuck's head. "Stop him from recording the deed! But you don't even knew who he is!"

"Oh, yes I do. I went down to the constable and he took me to the Buckhorn and we found out Dad was in the back room with two men last night. One of them was a worthless old drunk that hangs around town named Taylor. The other was a stranger, but this Taylor was the one Dad deeded the rights to. We know, because the Buckhorn waiter witnessed the deed. This Taylor has left town, but I'm going to stop him when he comes to record that deed."

It was too bad to destroy the one hope she had left. Tuck took her gently by the arm. "The fact is, Sally, that this is an old game. Taylor will never come up

here to record the deed. He's just a front for the fellow that was with him. He just got a few dollars for being the dummy buyer.

When the crooks in this industry do not want to show their hand, they get somebody like this Taylor to stooge for them. The deed won't be recorded until the fuss blows over, and then it will be somebody you don't know from Adam. Don't you see, Taylor was just a proxy, a proxy, see, for—"

It was like a thunderbolt.

"McGrew!" he burst out. "McGrew! McGrew's the one that's done this!" He shook her by both elbows, with no notion what he was doing. "Proxy! A hundred dollars! That's what he was saying over the phone last night. It's McGrew."

"What? What? You mean you know him?"

"Know him? Do I know him! He's the guy that jailed my crew. He—"

"But Dad said the name was Johns or Johnson!"

"Naturally he wouldn't give your father his right name. Sure, now I see why he used Taylor for a front. The Luna would boot him into the street if they heard of this. Listen, Sally, we're after the same man."

Sally stared at him, shaken and wide-eyed.

"Wh-what can we do?"

Tuck's brain was racing wildly. There *had* to be an answer to this, something, something; the answer his soul craved was to rush out with his six boys and pluck McGrew off the Luna lease like a walnut off a cake, but six against the Luna crew was suicidal. And what would they do with him if they got him? There was no recourse, no legal remedy for this thing, any more than there was for the jailing of the crew. McGrew was safe behind the figure of old Taylor. It was the kind of thing that in an earlier day in these parts, when Texas was younger, wilder, more roaring——

The idea didn't come to him full-blown, but in pieces, shreds and possibilities, which he didn't stop to put together.

"Sally! Have you a featherbed at home?"

"A what? A featherbed! Why, of course, but—"

He was already hustling her out the door. "Swede! Ace!" he shouted. The two heads appeared out of the pickup and blinked lugubriously. "Listen, you two, I want you to do something. I want you to do it now. Go and collect Baptiste and the other boys." He thumbed a ten-dollar bill from his wallet. "Take this and collect all the kids you can in town. Give 'em half a buck apiece for coming with you. Take 'em out to the Luna lease where that first crosslane is. Don't go on the lease, but stay on the highway. When you hear me do this"—he pressed the horn rim, which emitted a raucous bellow—"start down the road toward the far end of the Luna lease. Yell. Holler. Howl your heads off. Noise, that's what I want, noise. You got that?"

"Yeah, but—"

"Come on, Sally! Let's get that featherbed."

IT WAS perhaps forty minutes later that Tuck came driving along the road in the pickup toward the Luna lease. He was alone, and a tarpaulin covered the pickup's open back. He was driving, not from West Auck, but toward West Auck, having made an elaborate detour to approach the lease from the back. The elaborate detour had shown him that McGrew's crew were working where their debris of the morning had been, and that McGrew himself was at the far end of the lease with his surveyor, who was laying out positions for the crew to shoot. Consequently McGrew and the surveyor were the first that came into view as Tuck drove along the road.

"Hi there, McGrew."

At this sociable salutation, McGrew, who was bending over the surveyor's plane table, lifted his head sharply. For some seconds he remained so, apparently not sure whether he was the victim of a hallucination. He slowly walked over to the fence with his hands on his hips.

"What are you doing around here?"

"Just driving to town."

McGrew's beefy face creased with suspicion.

"What's the idea of the friendliness?"

"Why not?" said Tuck. "It's no hide off me if we didn't get away with it this morning. I was just obeying orders. It gives me a vacation."

"Oh, yeah?" said McGrew. He kept his eyes squeezed up while he surmounted the fence. He walked around the pickup. "I don't get this. What are you up to? What you got under that tarpaulin?"

"Look and see, if you want."

McGrew pulled back the tarpaulin. Feathers wafted upward, many feathers, hundreds of feathers, eddying and swirling in the air.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said McGrew. "Feathers! A load of feathers! What's the idea? What are you doing with them?"

"Carting them to town."

McGrew stood for a moment open-mouthed and then burst into a guffaw. "That's a hot one! So you're going into the feather business, eh? That's about the right weight for your brains. What are you doing, getting the proper surroundings for the next egg you lay? Ha! Ha! Ha! Did you hear that, Andy?" He slapped his knee.

"Oh, they're not for me," said Tuck mildly. "I'm just delivering them to a bunch of men in town. I've got to stop up here and collect a bucket of tar."

"Huh?" said McGrew. "Tar? What you talking about? Tar and feathers! Say, what's going on?"

"Oh, haven't you heard?" said Tuck. "Seems there's some old rat in town that rooked a farmer named Brewster. Got him to deed over his mineral rights for a hundred bucks. Taylor, this old crook's name is. He tried to scram, but the fellows in town caught him. What I mean, they're really het up. They nearly tore the legs off him before he even got a chance to talk. There must have been fifty men in that mob."

A peculiar vacuity had come over McGrew's face. It was the kind of stupid slackness that comes with intense attention. He stood staring at Tuck with not even his eyeballs moving.

"Talk? Did you say talk? Did you say this Taylor talked?"

"Oh, he talked plenty," said Tuck. "I didn't stick around for all of it. He claimed he was used as a catspaw. He said somebody else put him up to it. He said this other fellow slipped him a few dollars to act as the dummy buyer."

The rosy pinkness of McGrew's face had become a peculiar orange hue. When he opened his mouth his lips made a slightly sticky sound.

"Did he name the fellow? Did he say who it was?"

Tuck leaned on the horn rim with his elbow. McGrew jumped as if he had been shot. "Oh, pardon me," said Tuck, "I didn't know you were so nervous. I got my elbow on the horn rim by mistake. Well, no, he hadn't named the guy when I left. But the mob didn't anticipate any difficulty there. They told me to get enough feathers for two."

Far down the road an indistinct hubbub arose, a confused welter of sound, rising and falling like the roar of surf.

The surveyor hurried over from his plane table. "What the devil's that? It sounds like voices."

"Sounds like a lot of voices," said Tuck.

They stood looking and listening down the road. "Say, they're coming this way!" said the surveyor. "Wonder what's up? Let's go down and see."

McGrew's Adam's apple bobbled up and down. He opened his lips several times. His beefy face hung loose and sagging.

"You go, Andy," he said. "I'll stay here and watch the plane table."

"Sure," said the surveyor, jumped into McGrew's car, backed it, turned it, and drove off down the road.

The clamor was increasing, now; they could hear a howling sound, shrill, high overtones that reverberated among the trees. "Listen," said Tuck. "Sounds like they're hollering 'Lynch him! Lynch him!'—Say! You don't suppose that's the mob from town? You don't suppose Taylor's named somebody? But what would they be coming out here for?"

"Hey, Andy! Hey, Andy!" bawled McGrew. He ran frantically after the surveyor, but the car was already out of earshot. He came back making a panting, gobbling sound. "Listen, Tuck. Let me take your car. Let me borrow your car."

"Huh? Why, if you want to go down there, I'll drive you down there."

"I don't want to go down there!" said McGrew. Sweat collected from small globules on his cheeks, ran together in rivulets around the wings of his nose, and dripped off his upper lip. "Let me take your car. Do me this one favor. I won't hurt it. I'll bring it back."

"What do you want my car for?"

"Lemme take it, Tuck. We've always been friends. Anyway I have. Maybe we've had our ins and outs, but underneath it all I've always liked you."

"Well, I'll be damned," said Tuck. "Think of me not knowing that."

"Please, please!" said McGrew with an intensity that was almost a howl. "Let me take it. Or you drive it. Just drive it away and let me come with you!"

"I don't get this," said Tuck. He made an elaborate business of realizing a startling truth. "Judas, McGrew, you don't mean—? You're not the one—? It wasn't *you* that——?"

"Yes! Yes!" said McGrew. His cheeks quivered and spray flew out of his mouth. "Get me out of here. They're coming for me. They're going to lynch me."

The tumult was getting nearer by the minute. Dust, from many moving feet, was visible over the treetops. McGrew made sawing motions with his arms. "Get me out of here. I'll do anything. I'll drop the charges against you. I'll get your boys out of jail. Get me out of here!"

"You'll drop the charges against us?"

"Anything! Anything!"

"Get under those feathers."

McGrew sprang up on the side of the pickup and nose-dived into the feathers. Tuck pulled the tarpaulin over him, lashed it down tight. He drove crosslots through the trees, hitting the bumps as much as possible, while the chassis whanged up and down and gusts of feathers volleyed from the corners of the tarpaulin. He described a large and roundabout hook, so that he came out on one of the crosslanes and approached the yelling multitude from the side.

He pulled up. "Good Lord! There's another bunch of them. We're caught between them."

A hoarse and frantic mumble came from under the tarpaulin. "What'll I do? What'll I do?"

"Looks like we'll have to stop and face it out. You've got nothing to worry about. They've got no proof you're the one."

"They have! They have! I've got the deed in my coat."

"You have?"

"Yeah!"

"Listen," said Tuck, "there's only one place I can take you. This town is out for blood. I can see three separate swarms of 'em and they've got the roads blocked. I can take you to the constable and he can lock you up."

"Yes! Yes!" babbled McGrew. "The constable—he'll protect me."

Tuck climbed in again and gave McGrew a crosscountry ride that would have flattened the bumps on a dinosaur. When he pulled up at the jail McGrew appeared to be standing on the back of his neck with his head squeezed between the upper part of his thighs. Tuck came in through the gate and found the constable pruning his roses.

Tuck admired them. "Say, Constable, you know McGrew, the fellow that made the charges against us?"

"Huh? Sure."

Tuck put his hands on his hips and slowly shook his head. "Maybe I've slipped my trolley and maybe he has, but did you ever hear of anybody named Brewster that got swindled out of his mineral rights?"

"What's that?" said the constable. "Brewster? Sure. Feller in this town. Pop Brewster. Got bilked out of 'em last night when he was drunk."

Tuck opened his mouth incredulously. "Good Judas, it's true, then. I thought he was kidding me. He says he got the mineral rights for a hundred dollars. He says

he got an old barfly named Taylor to proxy for him. Is that the way it went?"

"Sure, sure. This here Taylor skipped town. Hey, what d' y' mean? D'you mean"—he nearly swallowed his quid—"are you tryin' to tell me McGrew is the one that done the swindling?"

"That's what he says. He wants to give himself up. He must have got religion or something. He keeps hollering that a mob of devils with pitchforks is after him. He wants you to put him in jail."

The constable dropped his pruning shears. "Where is he?"

"I'll bring him in."

TUCK went out and unstrapped the tarpaulin. McGrew came out of the feathers with a motion like the Australian crawl, landed leapfrog fashion on the ground, spotted the jail gate and bolted out.

"Hey, hold on there!" said the constable.

McGrew's appearance was singular, to say the least. He was dripping with perspiration, and to every visible inch of him feathers clung. They were on his back, his arms, his legs, his hands, his jowls, they were matted in his hair and ears.

"He wants to dismiss the charges against us, too," said Tuck.

"Yes! Yes!" gulped McGrew. "Hide me, Constable. It's your duty. You've got to protect me."

The constable's chin almost touched his shirtfront. "You're the one that cheated Pop Brewster out of his mineral rights? You're the associate of this here Taylor?"

"Yes! Yes! They're after me. Lock me up! They'll get me."

The constable unlocked the jail door. "Get in there."

McGrew's entrance into the jail was greeted by a loud chorus from within.

"Well, well, look who's here!"

"Say," said the constable, "this is bad. There's only one room in that jail. Those fellers don't like him none."

"Yeah, but listen, he dismissed the charges against them."

"That's right," said the constable, hastily unlocking the door. "Hey, you fellers, get out o' there. Vamoose!"

"We don't want to," came the chorus.

"The rapscallions!" said the constable. "I'll bet my hose an' hose 'em out!"

He sprinted around the side of the jail. "Hey, Blondie," yelled Tuck, "throw me out McGrew's coat!"

"*With* pleasure," said Blondie.

There was a confused and intermingled medley of sound, more like a nine-by-twelve carpet being beaten than anything else, interspersed by yowls from McGrew, and his coat came sailing out the jail door. Tuck had just extracted the deed from the pocket when he saw the constable rounding the corner behind a fifteen-foot geyser of water. "Scram, boys, here is the hose!"

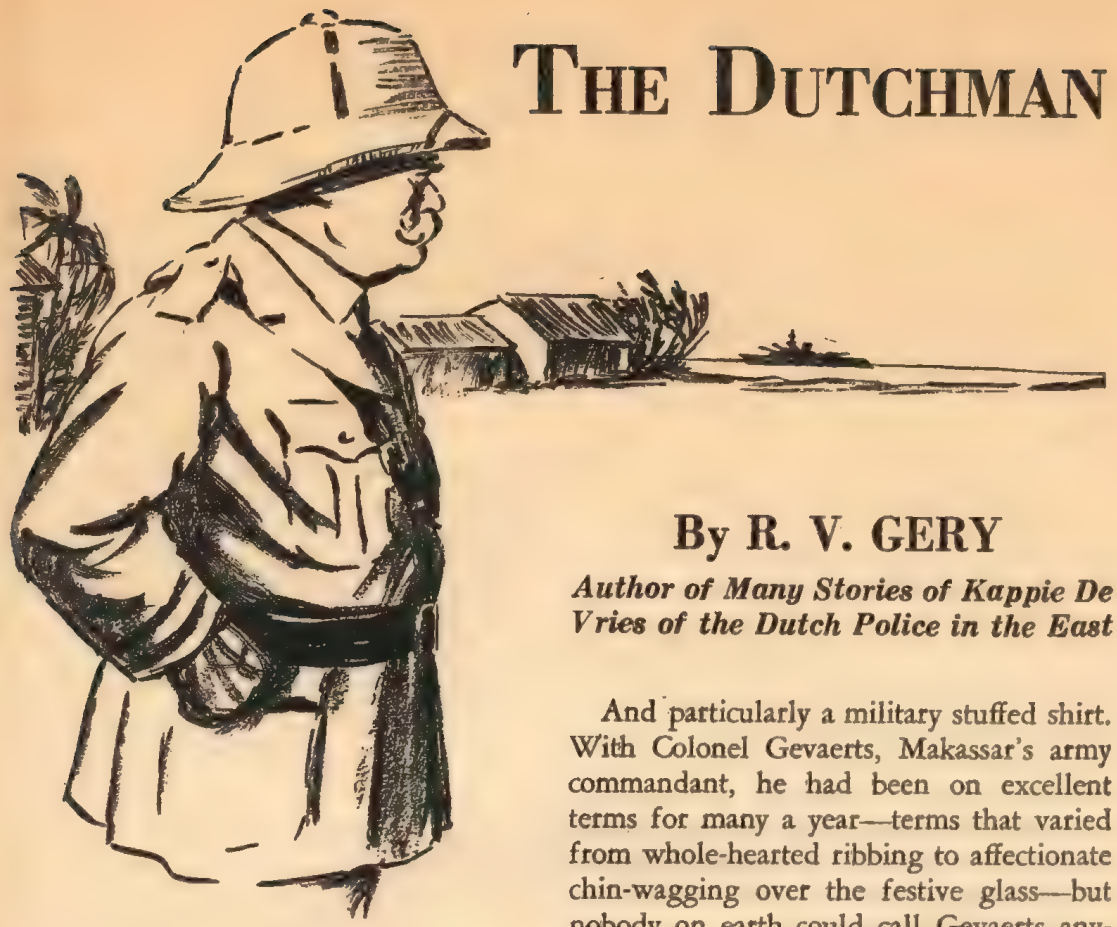
The prisoners bolted out the jail door not six feet in front of the foaming cascade. Not, however, McGrew. He made a scrambling grab for the swinging door and slammed it upon himself. This was a mistake. The constable poked the nozzle in the window and deluged the interior.

He cocked his bald head at the sealion-like gurgling inside and looked around in a puzzled way.

"One, two, three, four, five," he said, counting off all heads outside the jail. "Five of 'em was in the jail and five is out. Must be the bedbugs doin' that bellerin' in there, eh, boys?"

"Yes, *sir,* Constable!

WHICH, as Tuck said when he gave Sally the deed, wrote off everything but the national debt, and he was so surprised when she kissed him that he stepped back and knocked over a pan of peas she was shelling. It took him ten minutes to pick up the peas, and when he came out the front door a gnarled paw took him by the arm. The paw transferred itself to the side of a mustache the size of an adult porcupine, through which trumpeted the whisper, "How about a drink with a millionaire?"



# THE DUTCHMAN

## By R. V. GERY

***Author of Many Stories of Kappie De Vries of the Dutch Police in the East***

I

MYNHEER INSPECTOR KAPPIE DE VRIES of the Makassar police was a gentleman of strong likes and dislikes—and no inhibitions whatever about expressing them.

He liked food and drink—especially drink—women, companionship, uproarious mirth, fighting, and the intricacies and deviousnesses of his trade. He liked hard men, two-fisted fellows who might be expected to show action, whether for or against you, crooked little yellow guys you had to outguess; political shysters of his Dutch-Malay world whose idea of ward strategy was a *kreese* in the back; murderers and thieves and tough babies—he had a good word now and again for all of them. But there was one species of the race Kappie could never get away with, one kind of human he couldn't stand. He couldn't go for a stuffed shirt at all.

And particularly a military stuffed shirt. With Colonel Gevaerts, Makassar's army commandant, he had been on excellent terms for many a year—terms that varied from whole-hearted ribbing to affectionate chin-wagging over the festive glass—but nobody on earth could call Gevaerts anything but a grim and leathery Bobadil, a first class fighting-man. Certainly not any drawing-room carpet knight. And the same went, by and large, for all the other members of the Hollander army in and around Makassar—the men who, for the best part of a year now, had been standing by, with one eye on Batavia, their capital, and the other up the China coast at the brown men there. Kappie liked 'em all.

But now, on a morning last summer, there was somebody he didn't like due to be around. He was waiting, down at the airdrome, all among the Bofors guns peering skyward and the mantraps against parachutists, for an official visitor. In fact, all of Makassar's high-ups were there, in service uniforms and much on their best manners. All except Kappie, that is, and Kappie was frowning like the cliffs of Moher, because he had just observed the visitor step from his fast fighter-bomber and stand looking about him.

Major-General Sir Reginald Finch-Har-

# Mounts Guard

***One Species of the Human Race Kappie Couldn't Stand for Was a Stuffed Shirt. Especially a Stuffed Shirt Wearing a Monocle***

row, K.C.B., D.S.O., and a whole alphabet more—a complete British Major-General, brass-hat and all, down from Singapore, on a tour of goodwill and inspection of the Indies' defenses. Hell-on-wheels for that sort of thing, it appeared, this khaki-clad paladin from Whitehall, with the bright rows of medal-ribbons across his breast. But to one of his reception-party at least, he was nothing more nor less than a trial, a large, severe pain in the neck.

*"Ja!"* Kappie growled in an undertone. "A painted popinjay, almighty!"

He was inaudible, except to the inevitable Sergeant Jan, at parade rest two paces behind him. Jan's wooden features relaxed ever so little, into the merest hint of a grin. He had heard his superior on this line before, and he always got a quiet kick out of listening to him. He wondered, after his disciplined fashion, just what kind of a celebration this affair would end up in. There were usually proceedings of some sort, when Kappie De Vries started off in this manner.

*"Vervloekt* animal!" Kappie muttered again, glowering at Sir Reginald.

HE WAS quite a figure, all the same, this Britisher. A type, if ever there was one—the lean, slim-waisted, bemonocled type, that looked, in its marvelously tailored, crimson-tabbed drill, as if it had just stepped out of Gieves' store in Piccadilly. His silver-gray mustache set off a countenance aquiline, handsome, beautifully tinted by tropic suns—or port-wine, Kappie reflected sourly—and his smile was genial. He had a single pilot with him in the RAF's neat smoke-blue, and the pilot, too, annoyed Kappie hideously.

He was so very, so very-damned English, with his boyish features and high coloring. A pup, Kappie figured, a wet-nosed British pup.

Kappie normally yielded to nobody in his admiration of the British. As with Americans, he got along with them just fine—but this morning he was smouldering with indignation anyway, and the spectacle of Makassar's temporary guest hadn't done anything to improve matters at all.

Because, a few hours since, Kappie had

received an assignment. He had been summoned up to the citadel, and there the stout and much-worried civilian administering the big island of Celebes had given him the works.

"You will have a care for the safety of this mynheer," he had said, referring to Sir Reginald. "He is important, you understand—and with affairs as they are here, nothing must occur to upset our friends the English."

Kappie had known that, of course. With Singapore just across the road, as it were, full of Australians, Indian-Army troops, RAF bombers and fighters, and the British Navy, all of them very deeply concerned in keeping the rich Dutch islands where they belonged, it wouldn't do at all to have a *contretemps* over one of their big men. And such a *contretemps,* Kappie knew well, was perfectly on the cards, with the little brown fellows up yonder, and their Axis pals. A little matter like assassination —it had been tried in this war already, in Greece and elsewhere, and they wouldn't stick at it, if a chance arose.

Nevertheless, Kappie wasn't pleased one fraction at being appointed bodyguard and wet-nurse to any visiting fireman—least of all to a soldier. He had come down here to the airport seeking trouble, and one glance at Major-General Sir Reginald had filled his cup with that commodity, filled it to the brim.

*"Ja!"* he said to himself. "With this one I shall enjoy myself, ten million devils—I do not think!"

He glanced around, and across the little space of escort-lined tarmac caught another eye on him. It was an eye he could quite well have done without, just at that instant—the all-comprehending, mirth-suffused orb of Colonel Gevaerts the commandant.

The excellent colonel had been heaving and chuckling with merriment ever since he had heard of Kappie's newest duty; and now he was perfectly well aware of what was going on inside the Inspector's bosom, and was getting a lot of fun out of it.

That was another military gentleman Kappie could very easily have slain, right at that moment.

AS IT WAS, however, he had to pull himself together in a hurry, for the Administrator was advancing, with Sir Reginald at his side.

"Mynheer Inspector," he said formally, after making introductions, "I entrust our so-distinguished guest to your care."

Kappie saluted, swallowing his feelings —but it somehow seemed as if the general wasn't entirely pleased with things, either. He frowned a little, twisting his mustache.

"Unnecessary, mynheers," he said. "Perfectly unnecessary, I am sure. A great fuss about nothing."

There was one thing about this product of the British Staff College—he spoke an extremely tolerable and fluent brand of Dutch, so that even Kappie felt a prickle of surprise and mild approval. You didn't, normally, find this kind of personage good at foreign languages. Mostly, they stuck to their own.

Not this fellow, though. He had turned back to the Administrator and was addressing him once more. "I shall only be with you a day, Excellency," he was saying. "I'd a radio back yonder at Bandjermasin —and they need me, it seems, across in Sarawak. So I'll have to cut things short here, I fear."

The Administrator made little sounds of polite regret, and indeed, he probably was sorry, being a party much given to ceremonies and junketings of a heavy, elaborate description. He wasn't so pleased at losing Sir Reginald in such short order —but there was one among his entourage who thought different.

Twenty-four hours, Kappie De Vries mused, were soon past. There wasn't much that could happen in that time to annoy him—stuffed-shirts or no stuffed-shirts.

He was almost smiling as he accompanied the gathering to lunch.

## II

THE city of Makassar lay out under the sweltering tropic sunshine, uneasily aware of the times.

Not for two centuries and a half had war loomed on those jungle-fringed coasts. All the Dutch Indies' past had been one of peace, wealth, and development—but now, in these last months, everything was new and different, and the time-blackened ancient city looked as if it felt that change. There was a wary, watchful, secretive air about it, as if it knew what the danger was and was waiting for it. Its streets were filled with fighting men, tanks and trucks lumbered busily about, overhead the air was noisy with flight of war-planes, and in the roads outside a battle-cruiser and destroyers watched ceaselessly over the Strait.

Up in the citadel, the venerable stronghold that dated back to the days of the spice-wars and the *patroons,* there was also a deal of unwonted activity. The island Dutchmen, on their own since the Netherlands fell, were looking to their defences feverishly and with all the assistance of modern military science. They had some juicy secrets in there, behind the locked doors and bayoneted sentries, those earnest Hollanders—secrets that weren't to be shared with anyone except a high-ranking allied gentleman such as Sir Reginald Finch-Harrow.

Colonel Gevaerts emerged from one of the offices there, his great crane's-bill of a nose a deeper hue of copper than ever. He had the chief of staff with him, a little soldier with a bald head, and they were both of them in a very vile temper indeed.

*"Wat drommel!"* Gevaerts broke out. "This very-damned policeman—he grows a little too much, almighty! A—a civilian officer, instructing us in our duties!"

The staff-man nodded, tight-lipped. He happened, from the nature of things, to be new around Makassar, and he didn't know about Kappie De Vries. For instance, he wasn't aware that the Inspector had for years—in peacetime—been a sort of chartered libertine hereabouts, doing and saying pretty much as he chose, and nobody's meat in a quarrel. He didn't know of Kappie's engaging little habit of shoving himself into other people's affairs, and handing out advice all round, mostly where it wasn't wanted. He didn't know his Inspector—and so he was pretty well into the speechless stage by now.

For Kappie, in the inner room there, had just delivered himself of an opinion, upon a subject that really was no mortal concern of his whatever.

"It is not right," he had asserted. "For what do we tell this very-damned *Engelsch* pretty-boy all our secrets, eh? Who is he to know them, I ask you?"

He had been once more in no pleasant mood, the Inspector, because Sir Reginald had been steadily, but very efficiently, snooting him. All through luncheon, and during the ceremonies to follow, the chilly, gray-mustached Britisher had quietly made Kappie feel precisely what Kappie didn't want to feel—a hired bravo, a Scotland-yard bodyguard, a private thug. It was an experience new to the fiery Inspector, and he had said things about it. Spoken out of turn, in fact.

"Very good," said the chief of staff angrily. "Very good indeed, mynheer Colonel. We shall arrange matters for this inspector of yours. Batavia will——"

But what Batavia would do was not immediately evident, for at that instant the door opened, and the young RAF pilot who had flown the general came in. He was obviously in quite a taking about something, and he didn't hesitate in saying what it was.

"L-look here, sir," he began, addressing Gevaerts in English, "I don't want to be —er, unpleasant, but something's got to be done. The general's in a hell of a state."

Gevaerts regarded him speculatively,

twisting his mustache. "Ah?" he queried. "Your general is annoyed, eh, Mynheer—Brown, is it not? There is something of which he does not approve?"

"I'm afraid there is," said the airman reluctantly. "He's—well, he's not exactly used to being followed around like this. He doesn't like it, sir. I was wondering whether something couldn't be done about it. He's difficult when he's not pleased, and I suppose, with the short time he's got here, you'd be anxious to keep him in a good temper."

"Beyond doubt," said Gevaerts. "We cannot have the general displeased. A moment, Mynheer—" He turned to the chief of staff. "Something should be done," he said in Dutch. "I suggest the Administrator. De Vries has gone too far."

"Yes," said the other. "I shall see him at once."

"Thanks," said Mr. Brown to Colonel Gevaerts when they were alone. "I was sure you'd understand. Damned sorry and all that, but you know how it is. These senior officers——"

Colonel Gevaerts was a pretty senior officer himself, and he took the implied flattery down as if it were a gin *pahit,* with a pleased smile. There was something, he informed himself, extremely intelligent about this young gentleman in the RAF blue.

He was still purring amiably when the chief of staff returned from his talk with authority. Somehow the bald soldier wasn't pleased even yet.

"A million devils!" he observed. "Why is it these very-damned civilians are always pig-headed as—as sows? Tell me that, Gevaerts!"

The colonel looked perturbed. "He will not agree, then?" he queried, and the chief of staff frothed at the mouth.

"Agree?" he said. "No, not he. It is orders from Batavia, he says, that the closest care is to be taken of our—our distinguished guest. I am sorry, Mynheer Lieutenant," he added a trifle lamely. "There is a difficulty, you see, but wait—wait awhile and we shall see what is to be done."

"Too bad," said Mr. Brown. "The general'll be in a lovely state. I don't know exactly what to tell him."

The chief of staff patted his shoulder. "Tell him it is all being arranged, my dear boy," he said. "We shall look into the matter, the colonel here and I. I am sure we can make DeVries see reason, at all events. Eh, Gevaerts?"

The colonel chuckled. "It will be the first time, then, since that old crocodile was hatched out. But we can at least try, mynheer, we can at least try."

So they withdrew, the pair of them, with many a ceremonious leave-taking of young

Mr. Brown. That officer stood for a moment alone, rubbing his chin thoughtfully—and then he repaired, in something of a hurry, to the hotel, where the best suite had been placed at the visitor's disposal, and where Sir Reginald had preceded him in a huff.

He found that paladin extended in a long wicker chair, dealing faithfully with a tall golden drink. He seemed a good

deal less incensed about the matter now that he had been at the citadel.

"Very well," he said. "Keep after them, there's a good lad, won't you? It's a damned bore, having that policeman breathing down one's neck."

Mr. Brown had been standing formally at attention, the picture of disciplined subservience, but at the general's last words a remarkable expression flitted across his youthful features. It was a kind of spasm, as if he were trying to control them.

"What's the matter?" Sir Reginald demanded in a sudden voice of doom. "What are you making faces for?"

Mr. Brown collapsed abruptly. "I—I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered. "Touch of toothache, that's all."

"Have it seen to," said Sir Reginald in his most lordly fashion. "Is the plane all right, by the way? You'd better look into that sometime this afternoon or evening, I think."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Brown obediently. "I'll see to it."

A real nice, disciplined conversation between age and youth in the British forces —and just about then there was another real nice interview going on in Kappie's office on the Leidenstraat. Gevaerts and the chief of staff were trying to calm a very fractious Kappie.

"A little tact, Mynheer Inspector," the chief of staff was saying. "Almighty, we do not want to offend these Englishmen!"

*"Na,"* snarled Kappie. "Nor do we want to allow them into all our secrets, mynheers. It is a piece of very-damned folly, if you ask me."

"Forgive me," said Gevaerts gently, "I was not aware that anyone had asked you, Mynheer Inspector—or me either. We obey orders, eh? But what is necessary now, my excellent friend, is," he smiled, "just a little, little delicacy, let us say, in doing so. Do not, Kappie, be over-zealous, I beg of you; it is possible to guard this mynheer without, ah, infesting him, is it not?"

Kappie was sitting back in his chair, staring at them. "And what do you mean by that?" he enquired curiously.

They hesitated and boggled a little further, and then Kappie De Vries rose all at once.

"Mynheers," he said, "I do not understand this. There is something here that is a little beyond me, I will confess. First, I am to guard this *Engelsch* popinjay with the waist as if my life depended on it—and now I am to have a care, to keep away from him. Almighty, mynheers, you will forgive me for asking you if the whole world has all at once gone mad?"

## III

THAT was a question that might very well have been asked anywhere, of course; but in the next hours in Makassar it seemed as if Kappie had chosen the right place to put it. Because things started happening in that venerable city—things that were off-line even for Celebes in wartime, which is saying plenty.

To begin with, there was the case of the Constable Hendryk. He was one of Kappie's out-and-outers, an Indies-born Hollander with a rapidly improving nose for detail and an inquiring mind. Kappie had him slated for promotion already, and his assignment on this occasion was the nice one of keeping an eye on Sir Reginald at the hotel without being spotted doing it. He could be trusted, Kappie felt, to handle that job with credit, for a few hours anyway—until evening, when Kappie proposed to take over the duty himself.

But something happened to Hendryk. About four in the afternoon, one of the hotel coolies, sprinkling water on the shrubs under the garden-wall of the building, found Hendryk's boots sticking out of them, and Hendryk in the boots, very extremely dead. He had been stabbed from behind by somebody who knew all about that business, and thrown from a window, if his broken neck meant anything.

The only question was, which of four windows in a row, one above the other. The hotel was a modern building, and quite a skyscraper for these parts, and its floors were constructed to a uniform pattern. All four of the windows were at the blind ends of corridors—and there wasn't a soul who had heard anything untoward at all.

Kappie cursed like a fishwife, looking down at him. "Somebody is being funny," he muttered. "*Ja,* very funny indeed. Let us interview this funny Englishman and see if he has any views upon the subject."

But Sir Reginald hadn't. He was, to be sure, very shocked after his reserved British fashion, full of condolences, and offers to do something liberal for the kin of the unfortunate Hendryk—offers that Kappie received, by the way, with frigid politeness—and in the meantime he was infernally busy, my dear Inspector, and perhaps——

Kappie left him pawing over official-looking papers out of a brief-case, and departed, muttering.

"Somebody," he repeated, "is being funny here. What was it killed him, Jan?"

The sergeant had been doing some grisly work over poor Hendryk's remains, and he rose, shaking his head.

"A knife, mynheer," was all he was able to report. "Long, and with a thin blade—"

"A *kreese?*" Kappie enquired, and Jan repeated his headshake. The weapon, whatever it was, had a straight blade, not the flame-shaped or curved affair of the islands. Which didn't, to be sure, say that it wasn't an islander that had slipped it under Hendryk's scapula. There were plenty of *chiv*-artists around Makassar all right, and nobody knew that better than Kappie de Vries. "Very good, Jan," he said grimly. "Post a double guard and carry on."

That was between four and five in the afternoon, say. At around 5.15 the regular mail-plane from Surabaya and the west landed at the airport; and at 5.45 one of its passengers, a quite inoffensive little man by the name of Briggs, was discovered up an alleyway, with his throat cut from ear to ear, and no other marks of violence upon him whatever.

Kappie de Vries was still considerably put about over the death of his constable, but the news of Briggs' assassination pulled him up with a jerk. He went down to the alleyway in a hurry to view the corpse—his second, inside a couple of hours—and stood blinking at it.

"Hmm!" he observed. "And this also is very nice, doubtless—but it grows monotonous. Who is he, Jan?"

The wooden-faced sergeant came up with the information as usual. Mr. Briggs had been carrying another brief-case—Makassar seemed full of them that evening—and from the papers therein and his passport it developed that he was a purchasing-agent of the British Government; quite a minor personality, true, and not charged with any billion-dollar transactions, but an official representative all the same. They knew about him up in the citadel, and what he came for, and they were duly startled and perturbed at his taking-off.

"It would happen!" the Administrator grumbled. "Just at this time, almighty, when we have the general here. You have asked him, perhaps, about this Mynheer Briggs? Or maybe it would be better not—?"

Kappie thought it would be a good deal better not, after the case of Constable Hendryk—but he did the next best thing, which was to interview the immaculate Mr. Brown on the subject. The airman, however, shook his head.

"Never heard of him," he reported. "Nor's the general, I'm sure. We don't see much of the supply end of it, you know."

He fingered his lip disdainfully, as if such matters were altogether beneath his notice, and Kappie once more felt that inner urge to kick him. As it was, though,

such childlike pleasures were denied him; he could only swallow and return to Jan.

"You had better look after this business for a while," he said irritably. "Me, I have to go and make myself beautiful for a very-damned banquet, it seems. *Godverdomme,* they do nothing but eat and drink and strut, these boobies."

HE SWUNG off up the street, fuming —and the first person he ran into there, big nose and all, was Colonel Gevaerts, returning from an interview with the excited Administrator. For once the excellent fire-eater was not in a chaffing mood.

"Ten million devils, Kappie!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter with this accursed town? Your policeman—and now this poor *schellum* of an Englishman; it grows to be a habit, eh?"

Kappie looked at him sourly. "The whole world is gone crazy, mynheer," he said. "That is all. I believe I am even a little crazy myself!"

He stamped off, and to his little bungalow on the side-street under the trees. Micaela, his dark, capable young wife, watched him come in and recognized the well-known signs of trouble in her lord. She had his full uniform—a garb Kappie hated more than anything else on earth—laid out for him, and a reviving glass of *genever* at hand. Kappie tossed it down, squinting horribly, and fell to the intricacies of his toilet. He was whistling tunelessly as he did so, and Micaela pulled a little grimace behind her hand.

"There is something annoys you, mynheer?" she enquired cautiously, and Kappie exploded.

"Annoys me!" he spluttered. *"Ja,* there is plenty of that, to be sure, madame. A few murders, let us say, and such small matters. But now I have to go make a *vervloekt* fool of myself, sitting, watching another *vervloekt* fool eating. That is a policeman's life in these times, madame, and if you wish it you can have it for all of me. Myself, I am about to join the holy chuch."

Micaela had heard most of this before, and knew how to deal with it. By tactful handling she got Kappie to rationalize his indignation, and by the time he was shaved and dressed he was almost enjoying himself, describing Sir Reginald.

*"Ja!"* he rumbled. "A middle-age pretty-boy, Micaela—with a monocle, and I would swear, corsets. These British are a strange people, to be sure."

He ran on, venting his spleen on the world in general and Sir Reginald Finch-Harrow in particular, with much lively and impolite description of that warrior, and finally he went out, striding down the garden-path, his broad back looking like a gigantic pin cushion in its tight-fitting white jacket. Micaela grinned after him. She could never quite get over the incongruous notion that Mynheer Inspector Kappie De Vries was after all nothing but a large and rather comic boy.

She dropped into a long chair and picked up a magazine. It was one of those extensively illustrated affairs spawned by the war, and somebody had sent her a pile of its numbers, running months back. Micaela flipped over the pages idly, the reminiscent grin still lurking about her mouth-corners—

All at once she sat up, staring. The grin vanished, and a curious, puzzled expression appeared in its place. She frowned, shaking her head as if to get rid of a haunting notion; then she got up, magazine in hand, and went to the window.

Next moment it might have been said that that worthy young matron, Mevrouw Micaela De Vries, had broken every canon of Makessar's social code by swearing.

*"Wat drommel!"* she murmured thoughtfully. "Now what is the meaning of all that?"

## IV

SERGEANT JAN sat at his tidy desk in headquarters, scratching his head energetically, and talking to another cog

in Kappie's well-oiled police machine.

This was the celebrated—in certain circles—Ali; Ali the spy, the snooper, the secret agent. There were very few things about the seamier side of Makassar that the little man with saffron-yellow turban didn't know, but this time he was stumped. He and Jan both, discussing the tragic fate of Constable Hendryk and Mr. Horace Briggs of the Ministry of Supply, Whitehall.

"I do not know, *tuan,*" he confessed. "It is difficult—"

Jan snorted. "You tell me?" he replied. "We have nothing, eh, except that this poor *duyvil* of a Hendryk is killed in the hotel—maybe—and that there was no robbery of the Mynheer Briggs. That is all, eh?"

That was all, strictly, and they had to admit it was; and for a couple of sleuths of their caliber to come across with that one was a confession indeed. If Kappie De Vries had been there—

But Kappie at that moment was otherwise employed. He was sitting at table up in the ancient dining-hall of the citadel, watching Sir Reginald Finch-Harrow, and thinking that the handsome, bemonocled party didn't improve at all with acquaintance.

Placed next to the Administrator, Sir Reginald was doing a great deal of conversing, in that remarkably excellent Dutch of his, and upon a variety of subjects. He was certainly an affable enough personage when he liked, and to the company of his choice—but when his eye fell on Kappie, it was a frigid affair still. Once again Kappie felt himself growing hot beneath the collar.

"Pfui!" he said under his breath. "Great booby—"

Colonel Gevaerts, sitting at his side, fingered his long nose tenderly. "I wonder," he said in a similar undertone. "*Ja,* I wonder, my friend. Conceit, yes—plenty of it, almighty; but as to this booby stuff, I am not so sure."

The colonel seemed to have shifted his ground a little in respect to Sir Reginald. Hitherto he had been fathoms deep in amusement at Kappie's state of mind; but in the last hours—since murder had taken a hand, as it were—he had grown thoughtful. He was an observant kind of a body, this Gevaerts; and moreover, he was a soldier, which Kappie wasn't.

So he twirled his ferocious mustache, and the banquet proceeded—a gargantuan meal in the best Dutch tradition of hospitality; and back in Kappie's bungalow, Micaela took another long, long look at that page of the illustrated magazine.

She was quite a number of things besides being the best-looking girl in Makassar. There was pirate blood in her, adventurous, sizzling stuff, and a lot of intelligence as well. And moreover, she had a sense of humor, disastrously developed.

Moreover, again, she didn't know a single word about the extinction of Constable Hendryk and Mr. Briggs of the Supply Ministry. Kappie, in his petulance over dressing-up, had omitted details of the evening's events—and all Micaela knew was that the Government of the Indies were tendering a full-dress welcome to Sir Reginald Finch-Harrow, a Major-General of the British Army.

A gentleman, Kappie had said, with a monocle, and probably corsets, a handsome middle-age devil, and a number of other blistering things besides.

Well, it was funny, Micaela told herself—most remarkably funny, because here in that months-old copy of the illustrated was a likeness of this Sir Reginald; a press photo taken at some military doings or other up in Simla, complete with cut-lines underneath it. And that figure there wasn't either middle-aged, or handsome, or corseted, or monocled either, but a squat, formidable little fellow in the early forties, who looked as if he could do a great deal more than punch a hole in a pound of butter. In a word, the kind of a guy that im-

pressed Micaela De Vries devilishly, as a connoisseur of hardboiled males.

But hardly the sort of a person Kappie had been blowing off about. Young Mevrouw De Vries took a further long look at the picture and began to laugh.

Which was not entirely wise of her, from any angle. Because it signified, that giggle, that Micaela was devising a scheme for the discomfiture of her husband and the Government of the Indies. Kappie De Vries would never hear the last of this one as long as he lived, Micaela informed herself gleefully.

She sat down at her toilet-table and began to make up her face.

IN THE headquarters office, Jan glanced uncomfortably at Ali.

"There is something," he said for the dozenth time. "I do not know what it is, but there is something—"

Sergeant Jan had these psychic turns, and Kappie De Vries was in the habit of paying a great deal of attenion to them. Ali, too—although after his own Eastern fashion he was pretty psychic himself now and again. He scratched his behind agonizedly.

"*Tuan,*" he said, "why? Why are these men killed? There is no robbery—and *tuan* Hendryk was a constable."

He wagged his hands in a gesture of annoyance, for this was a mystery all right, and Ali didn't like mysteries, not in Makassar. Briggs' wallet, papers, and money had been intact, and as for Hendryk—well, Kappie had taught Makassar long ago that killing his constables was a very inadvisable kind of an exploit. There must be some *burra budmash* loose in town—some high-grade scamp—and Ali made a practice of being informed as to all such. Now he had no such information.

"Why, *tuan?*" he enquired again. Jan damned his eyes, thoroughly and completely, and the pair of them remained in silence, lost in uncomfortable thought.

Up in the citadel, almost directly over the hall in which the banquet still dragged interminably, there was a room.

It was a small place, heavily barred and bolted, with thick walls and a number of steel filing-cases set out in rows around it. In those cases there were some mighty curious things—matters which certain governments would have given their eye-teeth to get a squint at; notably the government up there at Tokyo, to be sure. For that reason, if for no other, representatives of that small-statured, brown-skinned nation were strictly barred from this floor of the citadel, and had been for some long while now. The Indies' authorities didn't believe in taking any chances with that dynamite stored away in there.

Nevertheless, Major-General Sir Reginald Finch-Harrow, K.C.B., and the rest of it, had put in a very interesting couple of hours that afternoon, with the Administrator and the chief of staff for company, looking over the contents of those safes. He had expressed himself as delighted and impressed with the military and naval secrets disclosed to him.

"Admirable!" he had said. "Admirable, Excellency. You seem to have things in splendid order, and I shall report so to my government."

At which the Administrator had bowed courteously—and now they were feasting below in great state and amity, and a sentry paced the corridor outside that locked plane-room, and everything was gas and gaiters in this best of all possible worlds.

All the same, Colonel Gevaerts, over coffee and brandy in that banquet-hall below, was doing some more mustache-twirling, and squinting down his nose in a very cockeyed fashion indeed.

He had discovered another matter that had escaped Kappie's attention—a small affair, true, but a whet to curiosity. The young RAF officer, Mr. Brown, was not in attendance at the meal—and that, somehow, didn't seem right to Gevaerts. A mighty eater and drinker all his military career, he didn't exactly see a junior turn-

ing down a chance at the fleshpots such as this.

Not unless, he ruminated, they bred a very different brand of cockerel in the British forces to what he had himself been when young.

He drew the circumstance to Kappie's notice, and the Inspector blinked.

"*Ja*—that is so," he said quietly. "It is odd, to be sure, Gevaerts. But maybe we shall have the pleasure of his company afterwards. There is always that."

To judge by Kappie's expression just then, he was not much enthralled with the idea. He looked, in fact, as if he could do very well without Mr. Brown until the end of time—and if somebody threw Sir Reginald in as well, it would be all right with Kappie. Fine and dandy, to tell the truth.

Kappie's dinner didn't improve his temper at all, and the prospect of the reception to take place after it made him gag.

Standing around in a tight uniform, listening to a bunch of military stuffed-shirts talking—

"Ach!" said Kappie, right out loud. "Ten million devils, Gevaerts, will this very-damned affair never be over?"

## V

ABOUT that particular instant of time, another individual was wondering pretty much the same thing. Flight-Lieutenant Brown of the RAF was returning towards the citadel from the airport, where he had been engaged in looking over the fast fighter-bomber standing ready there. He was swinging along the road in the darkness, whistling softly between his teeth—which was a bad habit of his.

Because what he was whistling wasn't any British music-hall ditty at all, but the song of one Horst Wessel, a gentleman who died a martyr (according to some schools of thought) a few years back. He probably figured, and rightly enough, that nobody out here would know the tune anyway.

They didn't—but Micaela De Vries knew something else, even if she was using her knowledge in a definitely crazy manner.

She was fixing to pull a fast one on her spouse, and on the Makassar authorities in general, by demonstrating publicly that things weren't what they seemed. In fact, that this Sir Reginald Finch-Barrow with the monocle and the corsets wasn't the genuine, dyed-in-the-wool article at all.

That was a piece of information just about as dangerous to handle as raw nitroglycerin, this evening in Makassar. It was a pity that Micaela De Vries, smart young matron, pretty humorist, didn't quite realize that.

A pity, too, that she chose to walk the few hundred yards from Kappie's bungalow to the citadel, instead of having herself driven by Jan in the police-car or someone. But it was a glorious tropic night, and Micaela was at home on Makassar's streets anyway. So it befell that Flight-Lieutenant Brown, an enterprising young officer, stopped whistling his tune at sight of a pretty thing in a cloak walking in front of him, with a folded magazine in her hand.

Mr. Brown was extremely busy just then over a number of matters, but he was never too busy for a little of the light and airy. He increased his pace to overtake Micaela. That was automatic.

It was also automatic that a lumbering figure, moving soundlessly along under the trees across the road, checked its pace and stood for an instant perfectly still. Sergeant Jan's uncomfortable sensations had finally got the better of him down in the office there, and he had dismissed Ali and gone to the citadel. He had to contact the Inspector or bust, he felt.

But now—now, this was different. Jan never had approved in the least of Micaela's gallivanting around after dark. She was Kappie's property, after all, and the big non-com felt himself responsible for

her. He said something crisp and guttural, inwardly, and then his eyes fell upon Mr. Brown.

Sergeant Jan had not taken much notice of Mr. Brown so far. He had contemplated Sir Reginald without much enthusiasm, out of compliment to Kappie's hating that gentleman's guts. But hitherto Mr. Brown had been merely an aide, an appendage, to Sir Reginald's splendor, Jan understood.

Then why, he suddenly inquired of himself, was Mr. Brown about the streets, when his boss was notoriously indoors ahead there, guzzling Makassar's best? And still more—Jan's face hardened—what the triple-dashed asterisk was he doing, making up to Mevrouw De Vries?

Because that is what he was doing. He had ranged alongside of her, a good-looking, trim young fellow, with a snapped salute and a conqueror's air.

"You are alone, *mevrouw?*" he said. "May I escort you?"

At any other time, Micaela would probably have told the gallant where he got off, with a round-armed slap in the gob to underline things. But she took in his uniform, with its British insignia and wings—and she smiled, devilishly, thinking of the ride she was about to take somebody, and the look on Kappie's face.

"With pleasure, mynheer," she said demurely. "I am Mevrouw De Vries and I am going to the citadel. You are with the English general, mynheer?"

Mr. Brown admitted it casually, and just as casually moved closer to Micaela. Where he came from that was the technic—crowd 'em and crowd 'em and rush 'em off their feet, and never mind what they said about it. He had used that approach in plenty of places, but maybe not with anyone quite like Micaela.

It might have been interesting to see what followed, if matters had worked out the normal way.

They didn't, however. Young Mr. Brown had a pair of remarkably keen eyes, and the slung electric street-light shone down between broad leaves overhead, and fell on the newspaper. It illuminated that cut of the squat, formidable little British staff-officer—and Mr. Brown drew back as if a snake had stung him. His hand shot to his tunic front and inside it.

And at that instant Sergeant Jan coughed.

All he intended to signify by that cough was that he was on tap and this was no place or time for Mr. Brown to get above himself with the Inspector's wife. He hadn't the faintest notion of that photograph, or of what lay inside Mr. Brown's tunic, or of anything at all very much as he came lumbering out of the shadows.

"Mevrouw!" he said with a stiff salute. "Mynheer!"

Mr. Brown's hand had dropped to his side again, and he was smiling. He bowed to Micaela.

"With permission!" he said, offering her his arm, and they continued their walk toward the citadel, with Sergeant Jan stolidly three paces in the rear.

But Sergeant Jan was a great deal less stolid than he looked just then. He had seen something—something that clicked inside that encyclopedia skull of his, starting those little alarm-bells ringing again, and causing Jan to blaspheme inwardly. He had seen Mr. Brown bow to Micaela, and that wouldn't do. No, mynheers, it wouldn't do at all; Jan knew about the English, and they just didn't bend from the waist like that. A supercilious inclination of their very-damned stiff necks, yes, maybe; but not the waist business, ever.

*"Godverdomme!"* thought Jan. "Now what, eh?"

He didn't know. Any more than he knew that Micaela, walking in front of him there, had just been closer to the pearly gates than she would ever be in her life, likely. Sergeant Jan didn't know that; but he did know, now, that something was definitely screwy somewhere, and that the sooner Mynheer Inspector Kappie De

Vries was notified of things, the better.

And that was one time when Sergeant Jan—the inestimable, the magnificent—was just about a jump and a half behind the fair. Because Mr. Brown, whose correct spelling was Braun, had got something inside his tunic there, and a most urgent call to use it.

He dropped Micaela's arm and whipped round, with the thing in his hand—an eight-inch, razor-edged stiletto. He didn't trouble about Micaela for the moment, except to give her a stiff-armed push that knocked her spinning. And then he was on Sergeant Jan. It was just too bad, because that big non-com wasn't ready for him.

For once, Kappie's second-in-command was caught clean off-balance, still thinking about that jerky little bow—and a long sticker, in the hands of an artist, is nothing to give any leeway to. Jan dodged automatically, and his fists came up in a movement of self-protection; but that was as far as he got before Braun stuck him. Under the fifth rib it came, and Sergeant Jan grunted and collapsed like a wet sack.

Braun whirled at Micaela. She was lying against the wall—a low parapet of the citadel's dry moat—and she had hit her head with the concrete, it appeared. She was out, cold. Mr. Braun looked at her, the crimson knife in his hand. For maybe ten seconds by the count, while his insides fought over a problem. He'd never, so far, killed a woman with that pretty plaything of his, and somehow, indefinably, he didn't like the idea, now it came to it. Too much like scragging a chicken.

It was a weakness, he admitted irritably, but—well, even one of the *Herrenvolk* could afford to be amiable now and again. He ripped Micaela's silk cloak into bits, trussed her up in it for a gag, and rolled her down the embankment into the moat. Jan went after her, and Braun dusted off his hands and cleaned the knife. Then he strolled quietly across the bridge and into the citadel.

A remarkably cool and collected young fellow, Herr Braun of the German Secret Service. He needed to be, for the job he had in hand next.

## VI

COLONEL GEVAERTS was standing in a corner, smoking a fat Havana cigar and looking thoughtful.

The banquet was over, and the reception was now in full swing—a strictly masculine gathering, with a great deal of bowing, scraping, and general fooferaw over the company's distinguished guest.

He stood on a dais, with the Administrator at his elbow, while Makassar's best filed past him, for a handshake and a soldierly word of welcome. After his dinner, with the flush of good living on his brow, Major-General Sir Reginald Finch-Harrow looked handsomer than ever, Gevaerts had to admit.

Immediately behind him, and looking very far from handsome, stood Mynheer Inspector Kappie De Vries. Discipline still held him, true, and his features were wooden in their composure—but there was a roll to his hard blue eye and a set of the pike's jaw Gevaerts had seen on other occasions. Kappie was just about in the last stages of unutterable annoyance. When this business was over, there was due to be some remarkable language around Makassar's precincts.

Gevaerts concealed a smile, and continued to eye the proceedings. He observed with mild curiosity that the young aide, the RAF officer, wasn't around even yet—a little strange, that, Gevaerts reflected again, but there was never any reckoning with these English. Doubtless the youngster was down at his plane.

And that was where the worthy colonel was off-line a good deal, because young Herr Braun was at that instant within fifty feet of him. Straight overhead, and a bit to the left, fiddling at a door.

There had been a sentry outside that

door, of course, but he came from the guardroom downstairs, and he was a simple kind of a warrior anyway. He hadn't looked for anybody on his post at all, least of all an RAF officer who came up a drainpipe and through a window like a shadow. So he, too, went the same way as Constable Hendryk, Briggs, and Jan—and Braun worked like a frenzied lunatic at the lock of that door.

He made it—the Teuton thoroughness again—and plunged inside; and down below Major-General Finch-Harrow continued to smile and smile, and wait. He had been waiting for quite a little while now; but if he was nervous in the least he didn't show it. It wasn't a job, this, upon which a person could afford to have any nerves.

He was waiting for Braun to pull a trick on the simple Dutchmen—the oldest, most April-fool trick of all—and then there would be some action. The airport wasn't a quarter-mile away, and that fast bomber-fighter was fueled up and ready.

By the time the *dumkopf* Hollanders had blinked the sleep and overeating out of their eyes, he and Braun would be aloft, headed seaward.

They would have some interesting documents aboard, too, for transmission to their Axis partners.

That, approximately, was what was running through the head of Major-General Sir Reginald Finch-Harrow, whose other name was von Bleibt. He was perfectly confident of himself, and in Braun, to pull the matter off; it was only a question of time, he ruminated comfortably.

It was maybe unfortunate for him that his training hadn't included instruction in the make-up and general indestructibility of Dyak pirates and their descendants—especially in the female line. He might possibly have been more prepared for things than he was, the Freiheer Major von Bleibt.

BECAUSE, when Micaela De Vries came staggering into the citadel, past the astonished sentries, and up the staircase, she was screaming. She was screaming at the top of her voice, and there wasn't any fear or panic or even pain in the scream—only pure, wildcat, Dyak-pirate fury. That second-generation ancestor of hers—the one it had taken a special Dutch flotilla to discourage—was on deck now, and Micaela desired urgently to kill somebody, right now, on the spot, at once.

Her outcries on the staircase did some very peculiar things to that gathering of gentlemen on the second floor. The buzz of talking died away, as if at the turning-off of a tap; the Administrator gaped, von Bleibt's monocle dropped out of his face, and Colonel Gevaerts swore. And Kappie De Vries shoved all three of them flying, and was down on the teakwood parquet, running.

He met his wife in the doorway, and positively reeled at sight of her. "In God's name, what is this?" he yelped.

Micaela stopped screeching. She was in rags and tatters, with a cut over one eye where the cement had caught her, and she looked like a banshee. She pointed at the guest of honor.

"That man!" she said. "He is not the English general—"

There was a complete silence. Makassar's best and brightest swung around to-

ward the dais—but Kappie was still staring at his wife.

"A million devils—" he began thickly.

Micaela grabbed his arm. She hadn't the newspaper with her now—Herr Braun had seen to that—but there was something utterly dynamic and convincing about her. "It is true!" she insisted. "The—the other one has killed Jan!"

KAPPIE ripped out a sudden, blazing oath, and spun round, grabbing at his pistol-pocket. There was a babble of voices, alarmed and excited, and the Freiherr von Bleibt up there had an expression that might have meant anything at all—and somewhere deep in the building Herr Braun pulled his fast one.

It was the oldest of all tricks, but Makassar was an old-fashioned city, after all. Herr Braun simply flicked the main light-switch and plunged the citadel and its environs into deep, tropic darkness.

Then he got out of there, flying. In the inner pocket of his neat RAF tunic were papers—the papers that would make those little brown gentlemen suck in their breath delightedly—and in his hand, once more, was the sticker. He was a packet of trouble for anybody, legging it toward the airport there.

He took the moat-bridge in his stride, chancing the sentry on duty there. The man challenged the fleeting shape, and even squibbed off a couple of rounds after it; but Herr Braun was used to such little attentions and merely cackled with satisfied laughter as he fled. And that was somewhat previous of him, for just across the bridge he caught his foot on something huge and solid, and went sprawling head-first in the roadway.

The something was Jan, crawling like a great damaged snail toward assistance. He was weak from shock and his exertions, but quite conscious, and in a horrible temper. Moreover, he had a pistol in his hand, and still more, he had caught a fleeting glimpse of the color of Braun's uniform.

"Aa-a-ah!" said Jan.

It was half a hiss, half a groan, and the crack-crack of the pistol underlined it. Herr Braun had leaped to his feet again, but he stopped again now, as if he was tired, stretching out his arms. His knees crumpled under him and he went down in a heap, and stayed there, twitching.

From somewhere in the darkness behind them there was more shooting—and a large, infuriated voice roaring commands. Sergeant Jan was pretty well done for, what with one thing and another; but he contrived to grin, lopsidedly, and flick a hand toward his skull in a salute.

Then he passed into unconsciousness, deep as the sea.

## VII

THEY had the Freiherr Major von Bleibt, that daring and resourceful fellow, under lock and key, with a .45 slug in his hip-bone and a scowl fit to sour the milk. They had Sergeant Jan in a hospital, and Herr Braun in the morgue, and the defense plans back where they belonged in those steel wall-cases upstairs. Wires and radio channels had been red-hot for hours, picking up the chain of events, and there had been some illustrious cursing, in Singapore and elsewhere, over what came to light.

It had been quite a performance, as even Major-General Sir Reginald Finch-Harrow—the genuine article—admitted. They found him, and his pilot, bound, gagged, and stuffed away in a smelly godown in a back street of Bandjermasin. He had set forth from Singapore all right, as per arrangements, and visited Batavia and Sourabaya; but across in the Borneo city they had, to use his own rueful expression, "done him up proper"—and the real wonder was how Herr Braun had abstained from some extra practice with that sticker of his.

"The officer-class," Gevaerts explained easily. "Even this Braun respects it."

Kappie sniffed. He was in a villainous mood still, after seeing what the night's adventure had done to Micaela.

"It is lucky for this Braun," he growled, "that Jan killed him. Otherwise I should have had the pleasure of doing so myself, and that would have been somethin, let me assure you, mynheers. I do not permit such animals to interfere with my wife."

He glanced irately across at Micaela, lying in strappings and bandages on a cushioned couch. She winked at Colonel Gevaerts.

"Listen to him," she said. "You would imagine, would you not, that he cared a *stuiver* for me? You should have heard him a while ago, reading me a lesson!"

Kappie flushed. "And time, too, mevrouw!" he snapped. "Since when do you take it on you to do police work, without consulting me? What do you mean by it, eh?"

There was a little silence, while Gevaerts examined the ceiling, and Micaela gathered her resources. She had plenty to say, it appeared, and she said it, with devastating effect—so that Kappie made odd strangling noises and pawed the air with a deprecating hand.

"Enough, enough!" he managed to get in finally. "I was wrong, and *ja,* if it had not been for you, little one, these *schellums* would have got away." He mopped his brow thoughtfully. "Almighty, it is true, too. They would have, the devils; Hendryk, this man Briggs, the sentry yonder, Jan—*wat drommel,* that Braun was an artist!"

"For what did he kill Hendryk?" Gevaerts asked, and Kappie shrugged.

"This von Bleibt does not talk—much," he admitted. "But he has said a few things; Hendryk, for instance. He overheard them talking German, that was all. And Briggs, to be sure, came from the British War Office and would have recognized the trick. *Ja,* who is there?"

A knock had come at the bungalow door and Kappie went to it. Outside was a

*In the next issue*

**SHORT STORIES**

*for* **February 10th**

It's a very nice sensation—suddenly finding yourself rich. But you can enjoy it more if you aren't worried about suddenly finding yourself dead.

**LEGACY OF DEATH**

*A novelette of the South Seas*

by

**CRAWFORD SULLIVAN**

Curious luck plays its part in a London blitz attack—one of the Curious Luck tales by . . .

**H. BEDFORD-JONES**

**FOG BELOW**

A flying tale of strong emotions and dangerous days. . . . by

**FREDERICK PAINTON**

**FRANK GRUBER**
**CADDO CAMERON**
**ROBERT ARTHUR**
**JAY LUCAS**
**BERTON E. COOK**

Stories of Adventure in tune with the trend of every man's thoughts

**SHORT STORIES**

*. . . A Man's Magazine*

**Is this the sign YOU are wearing?**

"Of course not!" is your immediate indignant answer.

But wait a minute. That's exactly what you are doing if you are taking today's great opportunities as they come—doing nothing to prepare for the adjustment days that must follow.

Why not tear that sign down—why not set a high price on your future?

Thousands are doing it—getting the better jobs now and making sure that they'll be preferred in any difficult days ahead—through LaSalle's home study training.

Let us send you free an interesting booklet—48 pages—on the business field of your choice. Write for it today! There's no obligation—nothing but valuable information that can help you change that sign.

**LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**
***A Correspondence Institution***
**Dept. 175-R** **CHICAGO, ILL.**

I want to know how I can make myself worth more. Please send me your free booklet telling of the requirements, opportunities and preparation in the field I have checked below.

☐ Accounting
☐ Executive Mgmnt.
☐ Traffic Mgmnt.
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Public Speaking
☐ Industrial Mgmnt.
☐ Foremanship
☐ Law
☐ Business English
☐ Stenotypy

*Name*_____ *Age*_____

*Address*_____

*Present Job*_____

MEN! This 7 JEWEL ELGIN WATCH Yours
WITH EVERY RING WHEN ORDERED AND PAID FOR
LINK OR LEATHER BAND
A YEAR TO PAY in FULL
SEND NO MONEY WITH ORDER
YOUR CHOICE of Jeweled Elgin, Waltham or Illinois wrist watch. New styled size 0 case. Reconstructed movement. Accuracy guaranteed. Given with every Simulated Diamond ring when ordered and paid for on our purchase privilege plan. Payments: $3.89 down, within 20 days after arrival, at your post office. Balance of $3.89 anytime within a year (total only $7.78). Remember, the cost of watch is included in price of the ring. Extra surprise free gift enclosed for promptness. Send NO money with order. Just rush name, address, ring size. It comes by return mail in special gift box, postpaid. M. KENDALL JEWELERS
Dept. NF-142 Topeka, Kansas
Men's latest styled massive ring
Rolled Gold Plate
Carats 50 point Simulated Diamond in heavy mounting


stalwart *chaprassi,* in the uniform of the Administrator's entourage, and he carried an official-looking sealed missive in his hand. The Inspector looked at it with extreme disfavor.

"What," he inquired dangerously, "is this very-damned affair now?"

He tore open the envelope, ran his hard blue eye over the contents, and set the paper on the table. Once more there was a silence, but this time, when Kappie broke it, he spoke calmly. It was the sort of calm a strong, powerful nature in agony might evince.

"I would not," he said, "I would not have believed it. No, impossible, I would have said, my friends—such things do not happen. Not in a world that is still, almighty, partly civilized."

He stopped, blinking, and Gevaerts chuckled. "What now, big man?" he inquired. Micaela had picked the paper up and was reading it; she began to laugh, uncontrollably, and Kappie turned on her with a hideous grimace.

"Give me that!" he commanded, and ripped the offending document to a hundred pieces. "It is enough, one would think, to be a wet nurse for a painted pup-popinjay that was an imitation; but now," he gulped, "the real one visits us, it seems, and I—I am appointed to do the same for him! *Voetsack,* you—outside! I have to get away from here. I strangle."

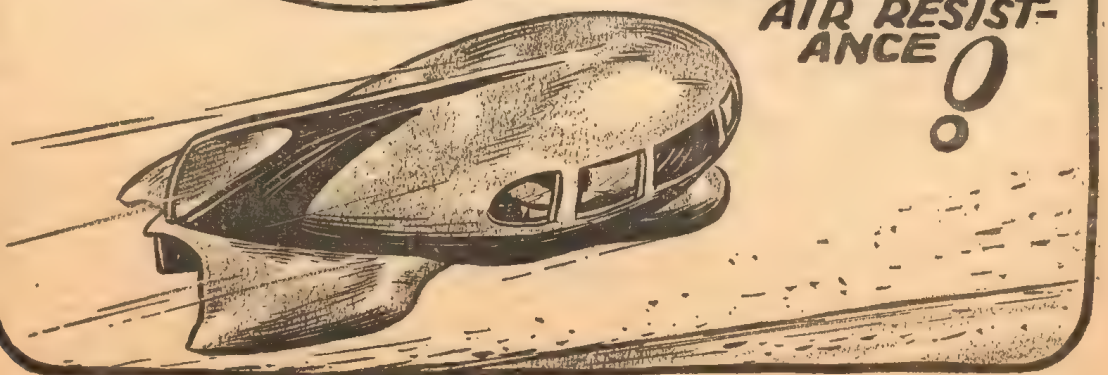
He seized the astonished *chaprassi* by the shoulders and thrust him forth into the night. Gevaerts and Micaela heard him go stamping down the garden path, baying the moon in an ecstasy. They looked at one another and grinned; somehow there was a completeness, a perfection about this last development that was beyond words. It was the sort of cockeyed affair that would happen to Kappie De Vries, Inspector of Police in Makassar.

# Curioddities by Weill

ONLY A LITTLE OVER HALF THE **GOLD** PRODUCED SINCE 1492 IS IN CENTRAL BANKS AND OTHER MONETARY STOCKS! NO ONE KNOWS WHERE THE REST OF IT IS, THOUGH GOLD FILLINGS THAT ARE BURIED WITH **DECEASED PERSONS** PROBABLY REPRESENT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT WAY IN WHICH GOLD, ONCE OBTAINED, **IS PERMANENTLY LOST!**

A BLACK **WAMPUM BELT** WITH THE FIGURE OF A HATCHET IN WHITE WAS SENT BY THE **IROQUOIS INDIANS** TO ANOTHER NATION ***AS A DECLARATION OF WAR!***

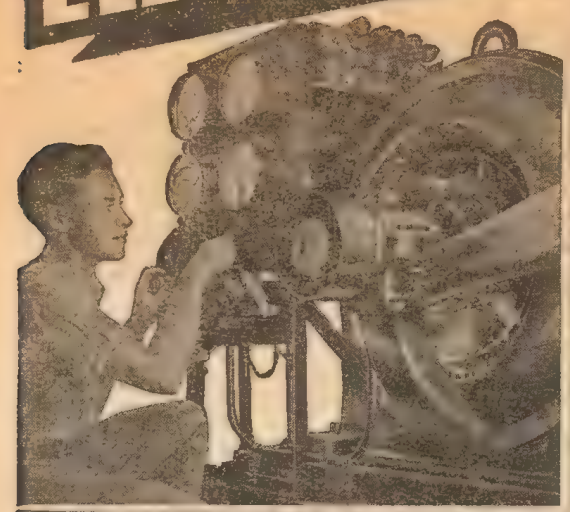
IT IS ESTIMATED THAT AN AUTOMOBILE DESIGNED ACCORDING TO CORRECT AERODYNAMIC PRINCIPALS ***WOULD BE 300 PER CENT MORE EFFICIENT IN OVERCOMING AIR RESISTANCE!***



WHAT INSECT IS AS STRONG PROPORTIONATELY AS A LOCOMOTIVE? *See Curioddities next time!*

AMERICA NEEDS MEN TRAINED IN..

ELECTRICITY



DEFENSE PROGRAM MEANS JOBS

I'll Finance Your Training

Where do you fit in today's gigantic defense program and industrial expansion? Now is the time for you to get your training for a good-pay job in Electricity—the mighty power that makes the whole defense program possible. Here at Coyne, in 12 short weeks, you can train for your Big Opportunity, and you don't need much money for I'll finance your training and let you pay for it in easy monthly payments after you graduate. "Learn-By-Doing" on real electrical machinery. Learn airplane ignition work, wind armatures, learn power plant operation, do house and factory wiring, etc. EXTRA: 4 weeks course in RADIO included at no extra tuition charge.

FIRST—You are told and shown how to do it.

THEN—You do the job yourself.

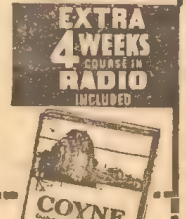
"LEARN BY DOING"

Coyne "Learn-By-Doing" training is EASY. First, the instructor tells you how to do a job. Then he shows you. Then you do the job yourself. Not a correspondence course. You don't need previous experience or advanced education. Get your training NOW. Pay for it after graduation in easy monthly payments. If you need part-time work to help out with board and room expenses, my employment department will help you find it. Low-cost Board and Room plan. Lifetime Employment Service after you graduate.

GET MY STORY

I have a mighty interesting BIG FREE BOOK that I want to send you. It's packed with pictures of students at work in my shops. Send for it today. With the book I'll also send you all the facts about Coyne training and my plans to help you even though you have little money. No obligation. No salesmen will call. Mail the coupon today.

EXTRA 4 WEEKS COURSE IN RADIO INCLUDED




H. C. LEWIS, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 12-66, Chicago, Ill.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY

H. C. LEWIS, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 12-66, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis: Please send me your BIG FREE BOOK and all the facts about Coyne.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

# THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by

PETE KUHLHOFF

## This and That

"I am interested in joining the National Rifle Association, so would you please send me the particulars. I have heard that large caliber rifles are available to members of the N.R.A. Is this so? Could you please tell me how I could obtain one?—J. F. M., Maryland."

I'm glad you are going to join the N.R.A., as it is a fine organization—and I'm sure you will get your money's worth. Incidentally, N.R.A. is the only organization that has consistently kept an eye open for bad firearms legislation and has led in the fight for our constitutional right to possess and bear arms.

The sale of rifles and ammunition to N.R.A. members by the Director of Civilian Marksmanship has been temporarily discontinued due to the present national emergency. The Enfield, caliber .30-06, sold for $7.50 plus packing cost.

—o—

"The writer is enclosing a sketch, actual size of an old pistol which he recently acquired. It has four cylinders, each of which is grooved or rather a single barrel containing four holes, chambers, each of which is grooved and will receive a .22 cal. metal cartridge. The sketch also shows how it is loaded by pushing barrel forward through spring release. The hammer is so made that each time the trigger is pulled, the hammer moves a notch to discharge the next cylinder. It is marked "C. Sharp, 1859," and on the bottom of the handle is the Serial No. 39369. It is in working order, but has not been used for about 25 years.

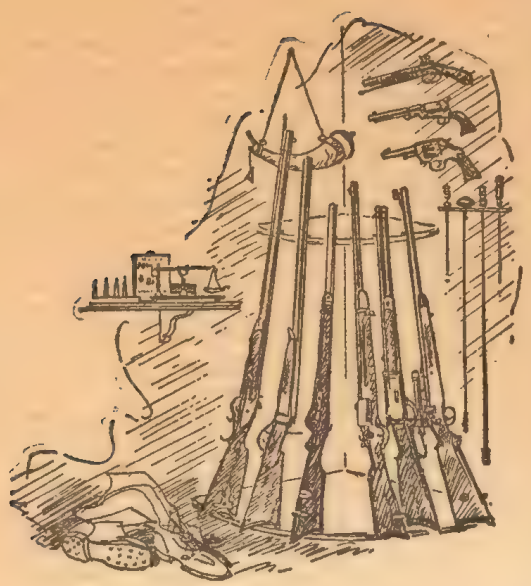
"I would like to know what value it has as an antique and where it could be sold.—W. H. Penna."

Your Sharps pistol isn't exactly a rare item. These guns are found listed by dealers for anywhere from four or five dollars to twenty-five or thirty dollars, depending on the condition.

I have no idea where you can sell the little gun—but you might try Stephen Van Rensselaer of Williamsburg, Va.

—o—

"I've been reading your interesting 'Shooter's Corner' and find it's quite worth while, so now I would like some information.



"I have been thinking about buying a Winchester Model 12 that will shoot the 3 inch shell. Will I get as good a pattern with it shooting 2⅝" and 2¾" shells as I would in the standard? How much heavier is it?

"It will be used on jack rabbits, pheasants, ducks, geese and blue rocks and maybe quail and skeet. Would you get a 28-inch barrel with Poly Choke, for I want to get as much range as I can but still have an all-around gun. I know that's a big order. Will the recoil be very great with a recoil pad?

"I have a Savage '06 but like the Remington 550 better, say with Patridge sights. I want it for shooting rabbits on the run, too.

"If I shoot shorts along with long rifles, will the shorts lead it up after a while?—Private D. D., Arkansas."

A year or so ago we patterned the 2⅝" and 2¾" shells in a Winchester model 12 with 3" chamber and found the patterns practically as good as those made with 3" shells. I have never noticed the extra recoil caused by 3" shells, especially when using recoil pad.

I would recommend the Poly Choke for all-around use. You can't go wrong here!

I personally like a receiver sight with large aperture for fast shooting. But maybe my eyes ain't what they used to be!

Lead will accumulate in a long rifle chamber when shorts are used. But if you clean the chamber with a brass brush after each shooting bee I don't believe you will have much trouble. Cleaning with Blue Ointment will generally remove light leading from the barrel.

—o—

"In a September, 1941, issue of Short Stories which was handed to me by a friend, I read your article very completely. There are a few points on which I don't agree with you.

"First, I will tell you a little about myself. I am 25 years old. I have attended the National

Prostatitis?

Many are finding welcome relief through the gentle vibration, adjustable infra-red heat, and dilation provided by the DILA-THERM. A modern, scientifically designed instrument for easy, economical home use. Liberal terms. Write today for full details and 30-day trial offer. Interesting booklet on Prostatitis FREE

THE DILA-THERM CO., INC.
2301 E. Colfax Ave., South Bend, Ind.

DILA-THERM

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY STATE
FILL IN AND MAIL—TODAY!

MEN WANTED!

EARN MONEY EASY WITH GREAT NEW TAILORING LINE
SENSATIONAL PAYMENT PLAN

Unbeatable values! Order-getting features galore—make it easy to earn big money and get your own suits FREE as extra bonus, showing friends sensational new line made-to-measure suits and taking orders on partial payment plan. No experience. No money needed to cash in big! Write at once for complete actual sample line of rich new woolens, newest styles and sure-fire-order-getting plans. *Sent Free!*
GIBSON, 500 South Throop Street, Dept. A-504, Chicago, Illinois

INVENTORS

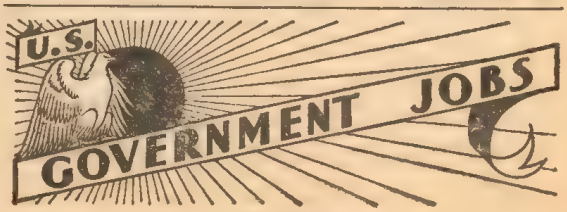
Take first step to protect your Invention—without obligation. Get free "Record of Invention" form and 48-page Book, "Patent Guide for the Inventor." Time counts! Write today.
CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN
Registered Patent Attorney
25-A Adams Building Washington, D. C.

PILES Try this Wonderful Treatment for Pile Suffering FREE

If you are troubled with itching, bleeding or protruding piles, write for a FREE sample of Page's Combination Treatment and you may bless the day you read this. Don't wait, WRITE TODAY.
E. R. PAGE CO., Dept. 483-H-2, Marshall, Michigan
or Toronto (5), Ontario, Canada

BEAT THOSE CHEATERS

New copyrighted book BEAT THE CHEAT just off the press. Exposing four major card secrets. Invisible Ink. White Card Ink. X-Ray Expose. Cesthru. Know first three cards down. Make any point with Fair Dice. Missers and Passers. Slot Machine and Punch Board Expose. Don't let crooks outsmart you. Get wise! Quit losing! Protect yourself. BEAT THE CHEAT for $1.00. (Add 25c for late catalog.)
SPECIALTY EXPOSE Box 2482-A Kansas City, Mo.




START
$1260 to $2100 Year

MEN—WOMEN
Thousands appointments each year.
Prepare now for 1942 Examinations.
Mail Coupon Today SURE.

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE,
Dept. E239, Rochester, N. Y.
Sirs: Rush to me without charge (1) 32-page book with list of many U. S. Government Big Pay Jobs. (2) Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.
Name .....
Address .....

LEARN AT HOME TO MOUNT BIRDS

Animals, Heads, Fishes, Pets; to TAN. Be a Taxidermist. Profit and FUN.

Hunters, save your valuable TROPHIES. Mount ducks, squirrels, everything. Learn to TAN for leather and furs. Wonderful HOBBY. Have a HOME MUSEUM.—BIG PROFITS mounting for others. INVESTIGATE NOW.

FREE BOOK With 100 fine game pictures. NOW absolutely FREE. Write TODAY.

Send Postal TODAY for FREE BOOK. State AGE.
N. W. SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY, Dept. 3031, Omaha, Neb.

FALSE TEETH

as low as $7.95 per plate!

Made in our modern laboratory from your mouth impression. Satisfaction or money back. SAVE MONEY—ORDER BY MAIL. Write TODAY for full particulars, FREE impression material and illustrated folder showing our many styles of dental plates. 90 Days' Trial

MARVEL DENTAL COMPANY
Send No Money Dept. 62, 343 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.

ITCH STOPPED QUICKLY

Use D.D.D. Prescription

Quick relief from itching of eczema, rashes and other externally caused skin troubles

35c bottle, at druggists, proves it or money back

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Not a substitute, not habit forming. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men. FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
600 Clayton Sta., St. Louis, Mo.

*Start the New Year Right*
*With a Subscription to*
SHORT STORIES

SONG POEM WRITERS:

Send us your original poem, Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject, for our plan and FREE Rhyming Dictionary at once.

RICHARD BROTHERS
27 Woods Building Chicago, Ill.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-139, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

Matches at Camp Perry for three years, 1938-'39-'40. I have shot in the St. Louis Metropolitan Rifle League for four years. I am personally acquainted with Bill Woodring of Alton, Illinois. At the present time I am a soldier. I was drafted in August of this year.

"My experience has ranged from .22 caliber match rifles, both Winchester 52 and Remington 37 to the .300 H. & H. Magnum. I have shot and loaded experimental loads for the following guns: .22 Hornet, .218 Bee, .22-3000 Lovell, .219 Zipper, .25-20 single shot, .30-06, .300 H. & H., and some muzzle loading rifles.

"You stated that the .22 long rifle with match loads is the most accurate cartridge in the world up to about 200 yards. I will say that at 100 yards, a rifle has to go some to beat the .22 long rifle. But at 200 yards it is a different story. I don't know if you are acquainted with the .22-3000 Lovell, but beyond a doubt you are familiar with the .300 H. & H. Magnum.

"The .22-3000 Lovell was first made about 1935. The original cartridge held about 14-15 grains of powder. The case is formed from the .25-20 single shot case. This gun is strictly a hand loading proposition. During the few years that followed this case has been experimented with and improved. The accuracy has not been improved very much but the powder capacity has been increased until now the latest form has a capacity of 18 grains of DuPont 4198 or 16 grains DuPont 4227.

"Getting back to my point, I have shot group tests out of this gun (which I consider as a poor target rifle because of its light weight barrel, this is my own personal gun which I use for vermin shooting) that measure ten shots in a 2" to a 2¼" square at 200 measured yards. For these tests I used 17.5 gr. of 4198 with a 50 gr. 8-S bullet and Winchester No. 116 primers.

"The .300 H. & H. also has wonderful grouping at 200 yards, groups of 2" or less have been shot with this gun. I have seen one group of

about 2½" that was fired from a machine rest at 500 yards. (For confirmation of this write to Western Cartridge Co., Alton, Ill.)

"You also stated that a 10, 15, or 20 power scope is of an advantage. Due to mirage I have found a scope of 10 power very hard to handle. I never considered anything more powerful than this. Also in the woods these powerful scopes do not allow enough light to use them to their best advantage. I, myself, have a 6 power 1¼ objec-

tive, Unertl, which I consider as the most practical all-around scope to use.

"I am not writing this as an argument, but as one shooter to another, comparing notes and experiences. I realize that I am young to express such statements, but I have been following this shooting game since I was 17 years old. I have studied Phil Sharpe's "Handloader's Manual" and read quite a bit besides.

"At the present time I am taking a course in small arms at this post.—Private D. T., Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland."

I still think the .22 long rifle will, under ideal conditions (no wind, warm weather, etc.) win out at 200 yards, say for 200 shots. (Let's hear from some other readers on this subject.)

On a very hot summer's day, especially when shooting fairly fast, a lot of trouble with heat waves (mirage) will be experienced when using a high power scope, or if it's hot enough you'll have trouble with any scope, or even iron sights. But when still hunting or target shooting in the shade, we have experienced no more trouble when using the 20 power than when using the 5x or 8x scope.

A lot of the boys around these parts shoot four position using the 20x job, and do pretty well with it, too.

Using the 20x scope in a shady apple orchard I have shot woodchuck that couldn't even be located with any other scope we had at hand, which included a 3x hunting scope, a 5, and a 10 power target scope.

# THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

*HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, c/o Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Your handsome membership - identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.*

### *Welcome—Iceland*

Dear Secretary:

Will you please enter my name as a member of the Ends of the Earth Club? I really believe that I rate a membership in your organization due to my present station of duty. On your map or compass, you have Iceland as one of the points of the End of the Earth.

IS your faith in yourself shaken? Can you adjust yourself to the changing times? Have you found your plans and enterprises suddenly thwarted by the unexpected—robbing you of confidence? You do not have to be a prophet to know what is coming—or a miracle worker to make the most of an opportunity. Just as straws in the wind show its direction, so you can learn from the things people do what their moods and fancies are—*and use them to your good advantage.* If you once know human nature—its traits and psychological tendencies—you will have a *confidence*, born of knowledge, and *equal to every situation.*

**ACCEPT THIS *Free* BOOK**

For several centuries the Rosicrucians—a world-wide Fraternity—have made a study of these *functions of mind* and their relationship to human conduct in the world in which we live. To thousands of men and women they have made life less mysterious—and *success* and *happiness* more assured. Write today for a *free* copy of the book, *The Secret Heritage.* It contains no strange formulas, but tells how you may have these beneficial teachings for study in the privacy of your home. Address Scribe K.U.W.

*The* ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
ROSICRUCIAN PARK SAN JOSE, CALIF.
NOT A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

FALSE TEETH

LOW AS $7.95

90 DAYS' TRIAL
TEST THEM
EXAMINE THEM

We make FALSE TEETH for you by mail from your own impressions. You have satisfaction of MONEY BACK GUARANTEE. Customers in United States and Canada report SATISFACTION but you be your own JUDGE.

SEND NO MONEY WRITE TODAY for FREE BOOKLET and MATERIAL.

CLEVELAND DENTAL SUPPLY CO.
Dept. 50-A2, East St. Louis, Illinois

Law!
LEARN-AT HOME
Are you adult, alert, ambitious, willing to study? Investigate LAW! We guide you step by step—furnish all texts, including 14-volume Law Library. Training prepared by leading law professors and given by members of bar. Degree of LL.B. conferred. Low cost, easy terms. Send NOW for Free, 48-page "Law Training for Leadership."
Lasalle Extension University, Dept. 175-L, Chicago
A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

GLASSES as LOW as $1.95 PAIR
16 DAYS TRIAL
Choice of the LATEST STYLES—remarkably LOW PRICES. SATISFACTION GUARANTEED or your money back. If you are not satisfied—they will not cost you a cent.
SEND NO MONEY
Write for FREE catalog today showing all of our many styles and LOW prices!
BROKEN GLASSES REPAIRED AT LOW COST!
ADVANCE SPECTACLE CO.
317 S. Dearborn St. Dept. H H-1 Chicago, Ill.

CHILDLESS
Wives
WHO WISH
BABIES!
Doctor's Information
SENT FREE!
Concerning simple way followed at home by which the female organs in relievable functional sterility may be assisted so that motherhood may then so often be easily possible! YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND MAY LATER THANK THE DAY YOU SENT FOR THIS FREE INFORMATION. Women from over the Nation write us of their joy in becoming mothers at last! FOR FREE COPY write to Warner Co., 322 W. Lake St., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

OLD LAPSED LIFE INSURANCE POLICIES
Have an Actual Cash Value
NEW MANUAL TELLS YOU HOW TO COLLECT. Our files are filled with cash collections made on OLD LAPSED LIFE INSURANCE POLICIES. All the simple instructions for collection on Lapsed Insurance are embodied in our "Old Lapsed Policy Recovery Manual." Nothing like it. $1 pstpd. Money Back if not delighted. POLICY HOLDERS BUREAU, P.O. Box 717, Dept. 30, Chicago

SONG POEM WRITERS
Write for free inspiring booklet outlining opportunities for amateur songwriters. Remarkable changes in music industry give new writers more chance than ever before.
ALLIED MUSIC, INC.
Dept. 43, 7608 Reading, Cincinnati, Ohio

I would like to have Pen Pals from all over the world. I promise to answer every letter which I might receive and will try to make my answers of interest to the receiver.

I am but twenty-one years old, but have been in Alaska, Canada, the northern part of Mexico, and in many places throughout our great United States.

My hobbies are many and varied: foremost among them are stamp and coin collecting, and exchanging of photos and post cards. Sports are a major interest in my life. Too, classical music, reading and the like are very interesting to me.

Very truly yours,
*Pvt. Alfred N. Anderson, Jr.*
USMCR, 1-Hq-6,
First Marine Brigade (Provisional),
Iceland,
c/o Postmaster, New York City, N. Y.

### *Paging Kansas and California*

Dear Secretary:

Will you kindly enroll me in the Ends of the Earth Club? I have traveled in most of the United States and some in Mexico. Being a typical hillbilly, I would like especially to hear from all those interested in hunting, fishing, trapping and target shooting. Also from anyone living around the southeastern corner of Kansas or around Los Angeles.

Thanking you in advance, I remain
Sincerely yours,
*William J. Wallace.*
40 Richards St.,
Brookville, Pa.

### *Paging Aviators, Loggers and Cowboys*

Dear Secretary:

I am a member of your grand club and am making a plea for pals far and near. I'm 19 and write stories and songs. Would like to hear from those around my own age, especially aviators, loggers and real cowboys. Sincerely,

*S. Thomas.*
Box 15, Broderick, Calif.

## ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB MEMBERS

*WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy* SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Note these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.*

C. J. Abel, Box 28, Mitchell, Oregon
George Acawa, C. M. S. Grammar School, Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
Harry Adams, Mountain Home, c/o U. S. V. A., Barracks No. 6, Tenn.
John A. Adedoyin, 49, Kadara St., Abuke-Messa, Nigeria, W. Africa
Fatai Antiri, 2 Hotonu St., Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
Moses Atakenu, 15 Ricca St., Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
Ted Bailey, Pannaoce, Nevada
Mercedes Baird, Box 78, Guymon, Oklahoma
Pvt. John Bardaville, 56th Q. M., Co. C, Ft. Custer, Mich.
John J. Batty, Rail Road Dept., La Lima, Hond., Central America
M. Beaulieu, 255 Bungay Rd., N. Attleboro, Mass.
Harold Beaumont, 5 Franklin Ave., N. Attleboro, Mass.
Alvin Blair, Route 1, Box 320, La Center, Wash.
Ramon A. Boland, 1026 Liberty St. West, Cincinnati, O.
Corp. Edwin O. Booth, Co. M, 159th Inf., Camp San Luis Obispo, Calif.
Victor Browne, Baptist Academy, Lagos, Nigeria, W. Africa
M. P. Alfred D. Bruce, Stotsenburg, Pampanga, P. I.
Almir Capella, Buurto Gonca 155 C. I., Engenho Deutro, Rio, Brazil
I. Coffman, Mill Point, W. Va.
Bill Cooley, Townsend, Mont.
M. DeLaney, Rural Route, Johannesburg, Mich.
Charles E. Doyle, 800 E. Court St., Beatrice, Nebr.
Sam Elias, 1971 E. Lafayette Ave., Detroit, Mich.

James Hanover,
SHORT STORIES,
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

I enclose these four coupons from SHORT STORIES.

Please send me a list of Ends of the Earth Club members interested in stamp collecting.

Name.....

Address.....

**World's Greatest Collection of Strange & Secret Photographs**

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes, the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of The SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND.

**600 LARGE PAGES**

Here is the world's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs. Here are Exotic Photos from Europe, Primitive Photos from Africa, Torture Photos from Asia, Female Photos from Oceania and America, and hundreds of others. There are almost 600 LARGE PAGES of Strange & Secret Photographs, each page 57 square inches in size.

**1,000 REVEALING PHOTOS**

You see actual courtship practiced in every quarter of the world. You see magic and mystery in queer lands where the foot of a white man has rarely trod. You see Oriental modes of marriage and female slavery in China, Japan, India, etc. Through the intimacy of the cameras you witness the exotic habits of every continent and the strangest customs of life and love in America, Europe, etc. You are bewildered by these large pages of ONE THOUSAND PHOTOGRAPHS, including 130 full-page photos, and thrilled by the hundreds of short stories that describe them.

Contents of 5-Volume Set
VOLUME 1
The Secret Album of Africa
VOLUME 2
The Secret Album of Europe
VOLUME 3
The Secret Album of Asia
VOLUME 4
The Secret Album of America
VOLUME 5
The Secret Album of Oceania

**5 PICTURE-PACKED VOLUMES**

Specimen Photos
Dress & Undress Round the World
Various Secret Societies
Civilized Love vs. Savage
Strange Crimes, Criminals
Omens, Totems & Taboos
Mysterious Customs
1,000 Strange & Secret Photos

The SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND consists of five picture-packed volumes (solidly bound together for convenient reading). Dip into any one of these volumes, and as you turn its pages, you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Here, in story and unusual photo, is the WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTION OF STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOGRAPHS, containing everything from Female Beauty Round the World to the most Mysterious Cults and Customs. These hundreds and hundreds of large pages will give you days and nights of thrilling instruction.

**SEND NO MONEY**

Simply sign & mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 Volumes is 9¼ inches high, and, opened, over a foot wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for $10. And it is bound in expensive "life-time" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.

METRO PUBLICATIONS, 70 Fifth Ave., Dept. 1901, New York
Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 great volumes bound together). I will pay postman $1.98, plus postage on arrival. If not delighted, I will return book in 5 days for full refund of $1.98.

Name .....
Address .....
City ..... State .....
☐ CHECK HERE if you are enclosing $1.98, thus saving mailing costs. Same Money-Back Guarantee.
Canadian Orders—$2.50 in Advance.

# Do You Like Western Stories

## by such writers as

**FRANK C. ROBERTSON**
**S. OMAR BARKER**
**FRANK GRUBER**
**ERIC HOWARD**
**W. F. HOUGH**

These and many other top-notch story tellers are regular contributors to the pages of RANCH ROMANCES.

They are writers who know the West and can spread before you the vast panorama of the range-land and make you a part of that great frontier that has played so great a rôle in the building of America.

You will find these and many others of your favorite authors and your type of fiction—and you will find Adventure in every issue of

**RANCH ROMANCES**

**AMERICA'S FAVORITE WESTERN LOVE STORY MAGAZINE**

**15c** *a Copy. A New Issue Every Other Friday!*

# World's Largest Dental Plate Makers

# FALSE TEETH

Posed by a Professional Model

## MADE-TO-MEASURE DENTAL PLATES *by* MAIL

***Direct from our Laboratory to you***

$7.95 TO $35

MAIL COUPON

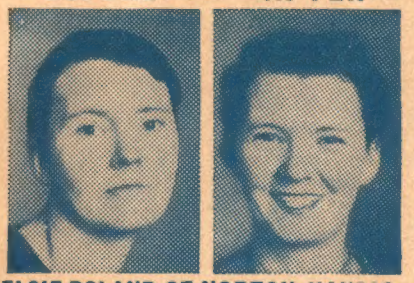
We make to measure for you INDIVIDUALLY ... **BY MAIL** Dental Plates for men and women from an impression of your mouth taken by you at your home. Thousands all over the country wear teeth we made for them—by mail!

## SEND NO MONEY!

ROOFLESS

PARTIAL

— BEFORE — — AFTER —



**ELSIE BOLAND OF NORTON, KANSAS,** writes: "Enclosed find two pictures. One shows how I looked before I got my teeth; the other one afterwards. Your teeth are certainly beautiful."

**Harry Willoughby, Adairville, Ky.,** writes: "I've received my teeth and am proud of them."

● The foregoing are a few of thousands of unsolicited testimonials in our files. We don't imply that you will obtain the same results . . . What is IMPORTANT TO YOU is WE GUARANTEE your MONEY BACK if you are not 100% satisfied.

## At Rock-Bottom Prices

If you find out what others have paid for theirs, you will be astounded when you **see how little ours will cost you.** By reading our catalog you will learn how to save **HALF** or **MORE** on Dental Plates for yourself . . . **Monthly Payments Possible!**

## On 60 Days' Trial!

MAKE US PROVE EVERY WORD WE SAY—Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not PERFECTLY SATISFIED with them, THEY WILL NOT COST YOU A CENT. We'll take your word!

## MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE of SATISFACTION

We take this risk. We guarantee that if you are not fully satisfied with the teeth we make for you, then, any time within 60 days we will gladly refund every cent you paid us for them.

A DENTIST SUPERVISES THE MAKING OF EACH DENTAL PLATE.

**FREE** Impression material—catalog with our New LOW Prices, and information. Don't put this off. Do it today!

**FREE** U. S. DENTAL CO., Dept. 1-13, 1555 Milwaukee Av., Chicago

Send without obligation FREE impression material, catalog and information.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

**U.S. Dental Co., 1555 Milwaukee Av. Dept. 1-13, C**

LATEST

STYLES

$

TRY OUR SIGHT TESTER

## BY MAIL!

FOR SEEING FAR OR NEAR!

## GRACE YOUR FACE *with* GOOD-LOOKING GLASSES

. . . Select for yourself from the many styles in our catalog the one that looks best on you. Get yours on a

## 16 DAYS' TRIAL

You be the sole judge . . . Wear our Glasses On Trial AS LONG AS 16 DAYS with a

## MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION!

Then, if you are not 100% satisfied with glasses we make for you, we will refund every cent you paid us for them.

**HIGH Quality Material, Expert Workmanship.** All our lenses are genuine Toric—the frames are made of dainty engraved Rhodium or finest 1/10-12 Karat gold filled. Expert opticians make our glasses for you.

**Prescriptions for Glasses Filled**

● **BROKEN GLASSES REPAIRED—*48-Hour Service.***

**FREE CATALOG & INFORMATION**

**U. S. Eye-Glasses Co., 1557 Milwaukee Ave., Dept. 1-13, Chicago, Ill.**

**FREE** U.S. Eye-Gl 1557 Milwau

Send without obligation and information.

NAME_____

PRINT NAM

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____

176 Pages
Jan. 25th, 1942
SHORT STORIES
A Man's Magazine

# Genuine-Late UNDERWOOD NOISELESS

Now $39.85 CASH

OR EASY TERMS—70c A WEEK

Completely Reconditioned and Fully Guaranteed.

MFRS. ORIG. SELLING PRICE $125.00

**Truly the most outstanding offer I have given my customers in years!** Only because of an exceptional purchase can I sell these completely reconditioned machines at the sensationally low price of $39.85 (cash) or on easy terms of 70c a week. Each one carefully gone over and refinished so that its lustre gives it the appear- ...e of a brand new machine costing over ...e times as much. *The mfrs. orig. sell- ...rice on this Underwood was $125.00.* ... to you in Underwood packing ...th Underwood book of instructions ... and operation.

## ...ELESS MACHINE

...ievement in typewriters! ...lting perfection with ...or those who want the ... a quiet home or office. ...od's Noiseless mecha- ... the nerve shattering ... to many models. *An ...rk because it allows ...educes fatigue, im- ...his typewriter dis- ...it is almost im- ... operate a few ... all the features ...US Noiseless

## EXTRA VALUE! TYPEWRITER STAND

Two Wings
Correct Working Height
All Metal

Mounted on casters, can be moved by touch of finger

For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a machine, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours for only $3.50 extra —payable 25c a month. **Quality built. Note all its convenient features.**

## NO MONEY DOWN 10 DAY TRIAL

### Easy Terms—10c A Day

**No obligation to buy. See machine on wide open 10 day trial.** Pay no money until you test, inspect, compare, and use this Underwood Noiseless. Judge for yourself without hurry and without risk. When you are convinced that this is the biggest typewriter bargain you have ever seen then say, "I'll Buy." Send only 70c a week or $3.00 a month until term price of only $43.85 is paid. Try it first, enjoy a full 10 days' steady use. **There is no red tape or investigation—My offer is exactly as I state it.**

## 2-YEAR GUARANTEE

I back this machine with my personal 2-yr. guarantee that it is in A-1 condition in every respect—that it will give first class service. Over 30 years of fair dealing and my 200,000 satisfied customers prove the soundness of my golden rule policy and prove that dealing direct with me saves you money.

## ...TYPISTS

...DS NOW IN USE! ...st built! Here is an ... modern features that ...s all standard equip- ... spacer, automatic re- ... IS NO RISK! SEE ... 10 DAY NO OBLIGA- ...wish send the machine

## ...RRIAGES

...or government re- ...billing, etc., only ... Takes paper 14" ... A Real Buy in ... Noiseless!

... Exchange
Chicago, Ill.

FREE

## Touch Typing Course

A complete home study course of famous Van Sant Touch Typing system. *Learn to type quickly and easily.* Carefully illustrated. Written expressly for home use.

**MAIL COUPON NOW · Limited Quantity on Sale!**

**International Typewriter Exchange, Dept. 292, 231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.**
Send Underwood Noiseless (F.O.B. Chicago) for ten days' trial. If I keep it, I will pay $3.00 per month until easy term price ($43.85) is paid. If I am not satisfied I can return it express collect. ☐ 10" carriage. ☐ 14" carriage ($3.00 extra)
☐ Check for typewriter stand ($3.50 extra—payable 25c a month). Stand sent on receipt of first payment on Underwood.

Name ..... Age.....
Typewritten signatures not acceptable
Address .....
City ..... State.....
**CAUTION—For quick shipment give occupation and reference**